

# CLASSICAL INDIAN PHILOSOPHIES : THEIR SYNTHESIS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

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## CLASSICAL INDIAN PHILOSOPHIES

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To  
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA  
A LIVING COMMENTARY  
ON  
SRI RAMAKRISHNA





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## PREFACE

In this book a survey has been made of the classical systems of Indian philosophy for the purpose of their synthesis and reconciliation. It is mainly based on a series of lectures delivered by me two years ago at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, at the request of Swami Nityaswarupananda, former Secretary of the Institute. This survey of the classical systems of Indian philosophy covers the major systems, namely, the Cārvāka, the Bauddha, the Jaina and the six orthodox systems including the Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita schools of the Vedānta. It is mainly an exposition of their general theories and doctrines which are relevant for the purpose of their synthesis.

The synthesis of the Indian systems of philosophy so far made by some illustrious Indian thinkers is based on the principle of *adhikāra-bheda*, and it is held that the different systems are meant for different classes of people who belong to different levels of intellectual development. Thus the different systems from the Cārvāka philosophy to the Advaita Vedānta are regarded as different stages in the development of philosophical thought from materialism to monistic idealism, *i.e.* the Advaita. Different men may accept and follow different systems, according to their intellectual gifts and capacities; but they should recognise the need and value of the other systems for other people and the importance of all the systems as stages in the development of philosophical thought and its culmination in Advaita Vedānta.

The synthesis of the classical systems, attempted in this book, is based on a somewhat different principle, although it



does not exclude and is not opposed to the other principle just mentioned before. It is the firm conviction of the writer that Reality is many-faced and Truth is manifold; that each system of philosophy approaches Reality from one point of view or level of experience and embodies one aspect of Truth. The different systems of philosophy may, therefore, be synthesised and reconciled as complementary parts of one comprehensive system of philosophy.

In working out this synthesis of the systems, I have received much light from the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and have found in them the germs of a synthetic philosophy. One wonders what philosophy there can possibly be in the homely talks and stories told by Sri Ramakrishna in a language which is no better than a *patois*. Still, I have felt for a long time the depth of the philosophical implications of his teachings, although they are deceptively simple and easy. In the last chapter of the book I have made just a tentative attempt to give an exposition of his philosophy, even though my understanding of his teachings is very limited and imperfect. It is a task which even Swami Vivekananda, his greatest disciple, would confess to a sense of diffidence to undertake. I feel this diffidence all the more. Nevertheless, I have tried my level best to give a correct exposition of the main philosophical implications of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings.

I thank the authorities of the Calcutta University, especially Sri Satischandra Ghosh, Treasurer, for kindly undertaking the publication of the book. I thank also Sri Sibendranath Kanjilal, Superintendent of the Calcutta University Press, and his energetic assistants for promptly printing the book and bringing it out early. My thanks are also due to Sri Jitendrachandra Datta, M.A., a disciple of the



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Holy Mother, for the help I have received from him to find out some of the references to *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakrishṇa-Kathāmṛta*, given in the book.

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S. C. CHATTERJEE





## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Indian philosophy occupies an important place in world philosophy. It embraces within its wide scope a large number of systems which present parallel lines of thought to almost all other philosophies of the world, and also includes some sublime forms of idealism which are unparalleled in the history of philosophy outside India. Of these, the classical systems belong to the ancient period of its history, but have had a vast and varied development in the medieval period extending from the early Christian centuries down to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries A.D. In the following pages we propose first to survey these systems and then suggest a possible line of their synthesis as parts of one comprehensive system of philosophy.

1. *Place of the Vedas in Indian Philosophy*

But before we come to the systems, we should consider the place of the Vedas in Indian philosophy. The Vedas are the earliest available records of Indian literature, and subsequent Indian thought, specially philosophical speculation, is greatly influenced by the Vedas, either positively or negatively. Some of the philosophical systems accepted the authority of the Vedas, while others opposed it. The former are regarded as orthodox (āstika), not because they believe in God, but because they accept the authority of the Vedas. To this group belong the six chief philosophical systems, namely, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, Yoga,



Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta. The latter are regarded as heterodox (nāstika), because they do not believe in the authority of the Vedas. Under this group the chief three systems are those of the Cārvākas, the Bauddhas and the Jainas.

The Mīmāṃsā and the Vedānta not only accepted the authority of the Vedas in all spiritual matters, but were the direct continuation of the Vedic culture. The Vedic culture had two sides, ritualistic and speculative (karma and jñāna). The Mīmāṃsā emphasised the ritualistic aspect and constructed a philosophy to justify and help continuation of the Vedic rites and rituals. The Vedānta emphasised the speculative aspect of the Vedas and developed an elaborate philosophy out of Vedic speculations. As both these schools were direct developments of Vedic culture on rational grounds, both are sometimes called by the common name of Mīmāṃsā (literally meaning rational study); and for the sake of distinction the first is called Pūrva or Karma Mīmāṃsā and the second Uttara or Jñāna Mīmāṃsā. But the more usual names of the two are Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta respectively. In their general character they may be regarded as pro-Vedic and rational systems of philosophy.

The Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya and Yoga systems were mainly based on ordinary human experience and reasoning. But at the same time they admitted the authority of the Vedas and tried to show that the testimony of the Vedas was quite in harmony with their rationally established theories. These may, therefore, be regarded as Vedic and pro-rational systems of philosophy.

The Cārvāka, Bauddha and Jaina schools arose mainly by opposition to the Vedic tradition and, therefore, they rejected the authority of the Vedas and based their philosophies on ordinary experience and independent reasoning



## INTRODUCTION

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which runs counter to the Vedic culture. These may, therefore, be regarded as anti-Vedic and rational systems of philosophy.

We propose to survey here these different systems so as to give a general idea of their main theories, especially of those that are relevant for the purpose of their synthesis. These are the theory of reality, the theory of the self and God, and the theory of the highest end of life or of liberation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Those who are interested in a fuller knowledge of these systems may read *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy* (6th ed.) by S. C. Chatterjee and D. M. Datta (University of Calcutta).

## CHAPTER II

## THE CĀRVĀKA PHILOSOPHY

1. *Its Origin and Scope*

The Cārvāka system is a philosophy of materialism. Materialism is the name given to the philosophical view that unconscious matter is the only reality. This view seeks to explain life, mind and consciousness as the products of matter. It reduces the finer and higher objects to the grosser and lower ones. It is thus opposed to spiritual interpretations of the world.

The Cārvāka view is very old. We find occasional references to it in the Vedas, the ancient Buddhistic literature and the Epics. But we do not find any systematic work on Cārvāka philosophy. Our knowledge of it is chiefly based on the statements of the Cārvāka views given in other systems of Indian philosophy for purposes of refutation.

The origin of the word 'Cārvāka' is rather shrouded in mystery. It might be originally the name of a sage who propounded materialism; or it might be a common descriptive name given to a materialist either because he preaches the doctrine of eat, drink and be merry (carv—eat, chew), or because his words are nice and pleasant (cāru—nice, vāk—word). According to some writers, Bṛhaspati, son of Loka, was the founder of materialism, and he preached the materialistic doctrines among the *asuras* (the enemies of the gods) so that by following them they might come to ruin. But whoever be the founder of Indian materialism,



'Cārvāka' has become synonymous with 'materialist'. Another word used for materialism is *lokāyatamata*, i.e., the view of the common people, and accordingly a materialist is also called *lokāyatika*.

## 2. *Perception is the only Source of Valid Knowledge*

The Cārvāka holds that sense perception is the only source of true knowledge. All knowledge of reality comes from perception. What is not given in some actual or possible perception cannot be admitted as real. Inference cannot be accepted as a source of valid cognition. It depends on the knowledge of a universal relation between the ground of inference (*hetu*) and the object of inference (*sādhya*). For example, the inference of fire from the perception of smoke would be valid only if we could prove the universal relation between smoke and fire. This, however, we cannot prove by means of perception, since we cannot perceive all cases of smoke and fire existing now in different parts of the world, not to speak of those which existed in the past or will exist in the future. To say that the universal relation may be proved by inference is to beg the question, for inference itself depends on the knowledge of universal relation. Nor can it be said that we may have the requisite knowledge from the testimony of a reliable person. For, the validity of testimony itself requires to be proved by inference. We accept the statement of a person as true *because* we know that he is reliable. It is no doubt true that in practical life we often act unsuspectingly on inference. But that only shows that we often act uncritically on the wrong belief that our inference is true. And it is a fact that sometimes our inference comes true and leads to



success. But it is also a fact that sometimes inference leads to error and failure. So inference cannot be regarded as an unfailing source of true knowledge which a valid source of knowledge must be.

The testimony of reliable persons or of the scripture is accepted by many philosophers as a source of valid knowledge. But the Cārvāka rejects testimony on the ground that we are often misled and deceived by so-called authority, be it personal or scriptural. The Vedas, for example, are held in high esteem by many. But in reality they are the works of some cunning priests who earned their living by duping the ignorant and the credulous. With false hopes and promises the Vedas persuade people to perform the Vedic rites and ceremonies in which the priests officiate and enjoy the emoluments. Further, testimony depends on inference for a proof of its validity. As such, it is as uncertain as inference. It may be that sometimes we attain certain desirable ends by obeying some authority. But more often we find that the knowledge derived from authority fails to produce any result, even when it is scrupulously followed and acted upon.

As neither inference nor testimony can be proved to be valid and reliable, perception must be regarded as the only source of valid knowledge.

### 3. *The World is Made of Four Physical Elements*

The Cārvākas hold that the whole world is composed of four physical elements, namely, earth, water, fire and air. Not only material objects like the sun and the moon, but also living organisms, like plants, animals and human bodies, are composed of these four elements, by the combination



of which they are produced and to which they are reduced on death.

#### 4. *There is no Soul*

It is generally believed that there is in man a spiritual substance called soul (ātmā) of which consciousness is an essential quality. The Cārvākas do not believe in any such immaterial soul. They point out that consciousness exists in the living body composed of the physical elements, and so must be a quality of the body itself. What we call the soul is only the living body with the quality of consciousness. That the soul is nothing more than the conscious living body appears clearly when we say, 'I am fat', 'I am lame', etc. It is only the body that can be fat or lame. So the 'I' or self of man is just the living body. There being no soul other than and independent of the body, death of the body means the end of the individual. Therefore, all talks and discussions about karma and rebirth, heaven and hell, immortality and liberation become meaningless.

#### 5. *There is no God*

The belief in God is a popular superstition. The supposition of an all-wise and all-powerful God is not at all necessary to explain the origin and order of the world. These may very well be explained by the natures and laws of the physical elements themselves. It is by the natures and laws inherent in them that they combine together to form this world. There is no proof that the objects of the world are the works of any intelligent agent. They are more rationally explained as fortuitous products of the physical



elements. The Cārvākas, therefore, generally prefer atheism.

### 6. *Pleasure is the Highest End of Life*

Since there is no life after death, the Cārvākas reject the popular belief, also endorsed by some philosophers like the Mīmāṃsakas, that the highest goal of human life is heaven (svarga) which is a state of unmixed happiness that can be attained by performing the Vedic rites. Heaven and hell, they say, are the inventions of the priests who persuade or coerce the masses to perform Vedic rites so that they themselves may enjoy the tangible benefits thereof. Liberation (mokṣa) as the total destruction of all suffering is cherished by many philosophers as the highest good of life. But it is absurd to talk of liberation of the soul after death, because there is no soul. If, however, liberation means the attainment of a state free from all pain in this very life, then it is an impossible ideal. For, existence in this body is inevitably bound up with pleasure as well as pain. So we should give up all false hopes of heaven and liberation, and try to make life in *this* body as much happy as possible, and avoid pain as far as we can. We should not throw away the opportunities of enjoying *this* life, in the futile hope of enjoyment hereafter. Where is the fool who would part with his sure, present possessions for the sake of doubtful, future gains? The goal of human life is, therefore, to attain the maximum amount of pleasure in this life, avoiding pain as far as possible. A good life is a life of greatest enjoyment. A good action is one that leads to a balance of pleasure and a bad action is one which brings about more pain than pleasure.



## THE CĀRVĀKA PHILOSOPHY

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7. *Vedic Rites are all Useless*

The authority of the Vedas is rejected by the Cārvākas on three grounds, namely, that they contain false statements, that many of these statements are tautologous, and that some statements are contradicted by others. They are, therefore, naturally opposed to the performance of Vedic rites and ceremonies with the object of either attaining heaven or avoiding hell or propitiating departed souls. They spurn the customary rites with laughter. If the food offered during funeral ceremony (srāddha) can appease the hunger of a departed soul, food offered at home should satisfy the hunger of a man travelling far away.

8. *Wealth is Good as a Means to Enjoyment*

Some Indian thinkers speak of wealth (artha), enjoyment (kāma), virtue (dharma) and liberation (mokṣa) as the four ends of human life (puruṣārtha). Of these, the Cārvākas reject the last two. Liberation is an impossible or suicidal end, and no wise man should work for it. Virtue and vice are arbitrary distinctions made by the scriptures whose authority cannot be rationally accepted. Wealth and enjoyment are the only rational ends of man's life. But wealth is not an end in itself, it is good only as a means to enjoyment which is the ultimate end.



## CHAPTER III

## THE BAUDDHA PHILOSOPHY

1. *Introduction*

The Bauddha system represents a spirit of revolt against the Vedic faith and philosophy, especially its ritualistic aspect. It arose out of the teachings of Gautama Buddha, the well-known founder of Buddhism. At an early age Gautama became keenly conscious of the pervasive presence of suffering in human life. He spent years in study, penance and meditation to discover the origin of human sufferings and the means to overcome them. At last he received enlightenment. The message of his enlightenment laid the foundation of both Buddhistic religion and philosophy which, in course of time, spread far and wide.

2. *The Four Noble Truths*

Buddha was primarily an ethical teacher and reformer, not a metaphysician. When any one asked Buddha metaphysical questions regarding the origin of the world, the immortality of the soul, etc., he avoided discussing them. Metaphysics, he pointed out, is no cure for the miseries of life. Metaphysical theories rest on uncertain grounds and are ever changing. These do not take man nearer to his goal, viz., Arhatship or Vimutti, the state of freedom from all suffering. The most urgent problem is to end misery. Instead of discussing metaphysical problems Buddha always tried to enlighten persons on the most important questions.



of suffering, its origin, its cessation and the path leading to its cessation. The answers given by Buddha to these four questions have come to be known as the four noble truths (*catvāri ārya-satyāni*).

### (i) The First Noble Truth about Suffering

The first truth about the existence of misery in life is admitted by all in some form or other. But with his penetrating insight Buddha saw that misery is not simply casual; it is universally present in all forms of existence and in all kinds of experience. Even what appears as pleasant is really a source of pain at bottom. Worldly pleasures appear as such only to short-sighted people. Their transitoriness, the pains felt on their loss and the fears felt lest they should be lost make pleasures lose all their charm and turn them into positive sources of fear and anxiety.

### (ii) The Second Noble Truth about the Cause of Suffering : The Chain of Twelve Links

The origin of life's misery is explained by Buddha in the light of his doctrine of *Pratītyasamutpāda*, namely that the existence of everything depends on some conditions. As the existence of every event depends on some conditions, there must be something from which our misery comes into existence. Life's *suffering* (*jarā-maraṇa*) is there, says Buddha, because there is *birth* (*jāti*). Birth is caused by the *will to become* (*bhava*), i.e. the blind tendency or predisposition to be born. This tendency again is due to our mental clinging or *grasping* (*upādāna*) the objects of the world. This clinging again is due to our *thirst* (*trṣṇā*) or



craving to enjoy objects of sense. The desire to enjoy sense-objects arises out of previous *sense-experience* of them as pleasurable (*vedanā*). Sense-experience again is due to *contact* (*sparsa*) of sense-organs with objects. This contact depends on the existence of the *six organs of cognition*, the five external senses and *manas* (*saḍāyatana*). The existence of the sense organs, again, depends on the *body-mind* organism (*nāma-rūpa*). But this organism could not develop in the mother's womb and come into existence without life and *consciousness* (*viññāna*). But the consciousness that descends into the embryo in the mother's womb is only the effect of the *impressions* (*saṃskāra*) of all our actions in the past life. And, finally, the impressions which cause rebirth are due to *ignorance* (*avidyā*) about truth. If the transitory, painful nature of worldly existence were perfectly realised, there would not arise in us any selfish karma resulting in rebirth. Ignorance, therefore, is the *root cause* of impressions or tendencies that cause rebirth. These are the twelve links (*dvādaśa nidāna*) in the chain of causation which causes rebirth and consequent suffering.

### (iii) The Third Noble Truth about the Cessation of Suffering

Since suffering arises out of certain conditions, it follows that when these conditions are removed, suffering would cease. When the perfect control of passions and constant contemplation of truth lead a person through continued meditation (*dhyāna* or *jhāna*) to perfect wisdom, he is no longer under the sway of worldly attachment. He is then free and liberated, and is said to have become an Arhat—a venerable person. This is the state of *nirvāṇa*—the extinction of passions and, therefore, also of misery. It is neither the



extinction of life nor the cessation of all activities. Of course, it means the end of all actions done under the influence of attachment, hatred and infatuation (*rāga*, *dveṣa*, *moha*). But the liberated one does not become apathetic to the suffering of his fellow beings. He is full of love and sympathy for all beings and works without attachment for their well-being, physical as well as moral and spiritual. *Nirvāṇa* is the state of perfected existence which is attainable here in this very life. The life and activity of Buddha after his enlightenment clearly show that *nirvāṇa* is not extinction but perfection of life.

(iv) The Fourth Noble Truth about the Path to Liberation

This truth lays down that there is a path (*mārga*) that leads one to *nirvāṇa*, the state of freedom from sufferings. It consists of the following eight steps and is, therefore, called the eightfold noble path (*aṣṭāṅgika-mārga*):

(1) *Right views* (*samyagdr̥ṣṭi*) which mean correct knowledge of the truth about the self and the world.

(2) *Right resolve* (*samyaksaṅkalpa*) which means the determination to reform one's life in the light of truths, and requires one to renounce attachment to the world, to give up ill-feeling towards others and desist from doing any harm to them.

(3) *Right speech* (*samyagvāk*) which consists in the habit of speaking what is true and good, and in refraining from lying, slander and frivolous talk.

(4) *Right conduct* (*samyakkarmānta*) which means good conduct and includes the *Pañca-sīla*, the five vows for abstaining from killing, stealing, sensuality, lying and drinking intoxicants.



(5) *Right livelihood* (*samyagājīva*) which means maintaining one's life by honest means and never resorting to unfair and immoral means even for the sake of life.

(6) *Right effort* (*samyagvyāyāma*) which means constant effort to maintain moral progress by banishing evil thoughts and cherishing good ones.

(7) *Right mindfulness* (*samyaksmṛti*) which means constant remembrance of the truths about the self and the world, namely that the self is not the body, the senses and the mind, and that all things are perishable and transitory.

(8) *Right concentration* (*samyaksamādhi*) which consists in continued meditation (*dhyāna* or *jhāna*) through four stages and culminates in the attainment of perfect equanimity and indifference or freedom from attachment. With this one reaches the desired goal of cessation of all suffering; he attains to arhatship or *nirvāṇa* and shines in life with the light of perfect wisdom (*prajñā*) and perfect righteousness (*śīla*).

### 3. *The Philosophical Bases of Buddha's Teachings*

Although Buddha was averse to theoretical speculation he could not avoid philosophical discussion altogether. His ethical teachings are based on some important philosophical doctrines of which we may note the following :

#### (i) *The Theory of Dependent Origination (Pratītyasamutpāda)*

According to this theory, there is a law of natural causation which conditions the existence of everything. Nothing in the world exists unconditionally or independently of all conditions. The existence of everything is conditional,



dependent on a cause. Nothing happens fortuitously or by chance. Everything that we perceive possesses an existence but is dependent on something else, and that thing in turn does not perish without leaving some effect. This is the universal law of 'Paṭicca-samuppāda' which Buddha calls the Dhamma to emphasise its importance for understanding his teachings.

### (ii) The Theory of Karma

The law of karma is only a special form of the more general law of causation as explained before. According to this law, as according to that of karma, the present existence of an individual is the effect of its past, and its future would be the effect of its present existence. This has been seen very clearly in connection with the explanation of the origin of suffering in the light of the theory of dependent origination.

### (iii) The Doctrine of Universal Change and Impermanence

The doctrine of dependent origination also leads to the theory of the transitory nature of things. As everything originates from some conditions, it must change when the conditions change and it is destroyed when the conditions cease to be. Therefore, whatever exists is impermanent.

### (iv) The Theory of the Non-existence of the Soul

Consistently with his theories of conditional existence and universal change, Buddha denies the existence of a



permanent substance in man called the soul which persists through all changes, exists before birth and after death, and migrates from one body to another. But though denying the existence of an identical substance in man Buddha does not deny the continuity of the stream of successive states that compose his life. Man's life is an unbroken series of states which are causally connected, just as a lamp burning all day and night is an unbroken series of different flames which are causally connected. Again, as from one lamp another may be lighted, and though the two are different, they are connected causally, similarly, the end-state of this life may cause the beginning of the next. Therefore, rebirth is not transmigration, *i.e.* migration of the same soul into another body; it is the causation of the next life by the present. The conception of a permanent soul is thus replaced here by that of an unbroken stream of consciousness as in the philosophy of David Hume and of William James. This theory of the non-existence of the soul (*Anattā-vāda*) has great importance for understanding the teachings of Buddha.

Man is only a conventional name for a collection of the material body (*kāya*), the immaterial mind (*manas* or *citta*) and the formless consciousness (*viññāna*), just as a chariot is a collection of wheels, axles, shafts, etc. The existence of man depends on this collection and it dissolves when the collection breaks up. The soul or the ego denotes nothing more than this collection. The permanent soul is an illusion which causes attachment and misery.

The germs of philosophical theories contained in Buddha's teachings were developed by his later followers along different lines. Thus there arose many different schools of Buddhist philosophy. These are divided into two religious schools—*Hīnayāna* and *Mahāyāna*.



#### 4. *The Religious Schools of Buddhism: Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna*

Buddhism is divided, in religious matters, into the two well-known schools—Hīnayāna and the Mahāyāna. The Hīnayāna school adheres strictly to the teaching of Buddha that everyone should work out his own salvation. It is a religion of self-help without belief in God or reliance on God's help in the attainment of liberation. It holds that nirvāṇa should be sought in order that the individual may put an end to his own misery. The Mahāyāna school is more liberal and accommodating in its spirit. According to it, the object of nirvāṇa is not to put an end to one's own misery, but to obtain perfect wisdom with which the liberated can try for the salvation of all beings in misery. It also believes that Buddha's watchful eyes are on all miserable beings and that through his mercy and help they will all be liberated. Buddha thus comes to take the place of God in the Mahāyāna school. . . .



## CHAPTER IV

## THE JAINA PHILOSOPHY

1. *Introduction*

The origin of the Jaina faith lies far back in prehistoric times. The long line of teachers through whom the faith was handed down consists of twenty-four Tirthankaras or liberated propagators of the faith, the last of whom was Vardhamāna (also called Mahāvira), a contemporary of Gautama Buddha.

2. *There are three Sources of Valid Knowledge*

Generally speaking, the Jainas accept perception, inference and testimony or authority as equally valid sources of the knowledge of reality. They reject the Cārvāka view that perception is the only valid source of knowledge. If inference and testimony are to be rejected because they are sometimes misleading, we should also deny the validity of perception because even perception sometimes proves illusory. In fact, the Cārvākas themselves take the help of inference when by observing *some* cases of inference to be misleading they come to hold that *all* inference is invalid, and also when they deny the existence of objects *because* they are not perceived. Inference yields valid knowledge when it obeys the rules of correct reasoning. Testimony is valid when it is the statement of a reliable authority. In fact, we know the truth about many spiritual matters, which cannot be



known through perception and reasoning, from the testimony of the perfected saints and sages (Jinas or Tirthankaras).

### 3. *Every Judgment is Relative*

Ordinary human beings are all imperfect. They can look at an object from one particular point of view at a time and have consequently the knowledge of only one aspect or character of the thing. Every judgment that we pass in daily life about any object is, therefore, true only in reference to the particular standpoint occupied and the particular aspect of the object considered. Hence all our judgments are relative and conditional. It is because we forget this limitation and regard our judgment as unconditionally true that we come to disagree and quarrel very often in life. Similarly, the various systems of philosophy give different accounts of the universe from different points of view. They quarrel because they do not bear in mind that each account is true only from its own standpoint and is, therefore, relative and conditional. Each of them gives some truth, but not the whole truth about Reality or the universe.

### 4. *Every Object has Innumerable Characters : Reality is Many-faced*

The Jainas hold that every object known by us has innumerable characters (ananta-dharmaka). Every object is what it is because of its positive and negative characters. The positive characters are those that are present in it. The negative ones are those that are absent in it and distinguish it from all other objects of the world. Thus the positive characters of a man are all his qualities and relations to other



objects of the world, which are practically uncountable. The negative characters which determine the man consist of what he is not. To know him fully, we should know how he is distinguished from everything else in the world. If to these, we add those new characters which an object takes with the change of time, then the object is found really to possess infinite characters.

Jaina writers, therefore, remark that he who knows one object fully, knows everything. But only an omniscient person (kevalī) can have such complete knowledge about an object. For imperfect beings like us only a partial knowledge of what an object is or is not is possible and sufficient for practical purposes. But we should not think that our ordinary knowledge about an object is complete and perfect.

It follows that Reality or the totality of the universe has infinite characters. It has infinite aspects and faces (anekānta) which can never be exhausted. It follows also that Truth is manifold and that each system of philosophy approaches Reality from one point of view or level of experience and embodies one aspect of Truth.

### 5. *The World consists of two Kinds of Reality :*

#### *Jīva and Ajīva*

The real is both permanent and changing. It consists of three factors : permanence, origination and decay. All reals are divided into the two broad classes of jīva and ajīva—the living and the non-living. Non-living reals or substances are of five kinds, namely, matter or pudgala, space or ākāśa, time or kāla, dharma or the condition of motion and adharma or the condition of rest. All reals including jīvas or souls but excluding time possess extension



and are called *astikāyas*. Time is the only real which is devoid of extension and is, therefore, called *anastikāya*.

### 6. *The Soul or Jīva*

A soul or *jīva* is a living, conscious substance, and it has extension (*astikāya*). Consciousness is the essence of the soul. It is always present in the soul, though its nature and degree may vary. Every living being has a soul, however imperfect its body may be. But the consciousness of the soul is of different kinds and degrees in different living bodies. Souls may be arranged in a continuous series according to the degrees of consciousness. At the highest end of the scale would be perfect souls that have overcome all *karman*s and attained omniscience. At the lowest end would stand the most imperfect souls which inhabit bodies of earth, water, fire, and air or vegetable. In them life and consciousness appear to be absent. But really even here consciousness of a tactual kind is present; only consciousness is in a dormant form owing to the overpowering influence of *karman*-obstacles. Midway between would lie souls having two to five senses, like worms, ants, bees and men.

It is the soul that knows things, performs activities, enjoys pleasures, suffers pain, and illumines itself and other objects. The soul is eternal, but it undergoes changes of states. It is different from the body and its existence is directly proved by its consciousness of itself.

Every soul is potentially perfect. But owing to the inclinations generated by its past actions a *jīva* comes to inhabit different bodies successively. Like a light it illuminates or renders conscious the entire body in which it lives. Though it has no form (*mūrti*), it acquires like a



light the size and form of the body wherein it lives. In this sense a *jīva*, though formless, is said to occupy space or possess extension. The *jīva* is not infinite but co-extensive with the body, as it can immediately know objects only within the body. Consciousness is not present everywhere, but only in the body.

### 7. *Bondage of the Soul*

Generally speaking, bondage means the liability of the individual to birth and all consequent sufferings. The suffering individual, for the Jaina, is a *jīva* or a living, conscious substance called the soul. This soul is inherently perfect. It has infinite potentiality within. Infinite knowledge, infinite faith, infinite power and infinite bliss can all be attained by the soul if it can only remove from within itself all obstacles that stand in the way. Just as the sun shines forth to illuminate the whole world as soon as the atmosphere is freed of cloud and fog, similarly the soul attains omniscience and other perfections inherent in it as soon as the obstacles are removed. These obstacles are constituted by matter-particles which infect the soul and overpower its natural qualities. The karma or the sum of the past life of a soul generates in it certain blind cravings and passions that seek satisfaction. These cravings in a soul attract to it particular sorts of matter-particles and organise them into the body unconsciously desired. The soul with its passions or karma-forces is, therefore, the organiser of the body. The limitations that we find in any individual soul, or its bondage is due to the material body with which the soul has identified itself. The passions which cause bondage are anger, pride, infatuation and greed (*rāga*, *māna*, *māyā*,



lobha). These are called *kaṣāyas* (i.e. sticky substances) because the presence of these in the soul makes matter-particles stick to it.

Bondage, in Jaina philosophy, thus comes to mean the fact that the *jīva*, infected with passions, takes up matter in accordance with its karma. As passion or bad disposition of the soul is the internal and primary cause of bondage, the Jainas point out that bondage begins in thought. They, therefore, speak of two kinds of bondage, namely, internal or ideal bondage to bad disposition (*bhāva-bandha*) and material bondage which is its effect and consists in the soul's actual association with matter (*dravya-bandha*).

### 8. *The Threefold Path to Liberation*

As ignorance about the real nature of our souls and other things is the cause of the passions or cravings that lead to the soul's bondage to matter, right knowledge of reality (*samyag-jñāna*) is necessary for liberation. Such right knowledge can be obtained only by studying the teachings of the omniscient Tirthaṅkaras who have already attained liberation and are, therefore, fit to lead others out of bondage. But before one feels inclined to study their teachings, one must have a general acquaintance with them and consequent faith in the competence of these teachers. This right sort of faith based on general preliminary acquaintance (called *samyag-darśana*) paves the way for right knowledge and is, therefore, regarded as indispensable. But mere knowledge is useless unless it is put to practice. Right conduct (*samyak-cāritra*) is, therefore, regarded by the Jainas as the third indispensable condition of liberation. For right conduct one must take and practise the five great



vows (pañca-mahāvratā), namely, (i) ahimsā or non-injury to any life in thought, word and deed; (ii) satya or truthfulness which consists in speaking what is true as well as pleasant and good; (iii) asteya which consists in not taking what one is not given; (iv) brahmacarya which consists in abstaining from all kinds of self-indulgence, and (v) aparigraha which consists in abstaining from all attachment to objects of sense.

Right faith, right knowledge and right conduct should be jointly and harmoniously cultivated in order that one may become free from all passions and the effects of all old karmas, and thereby attain liberation. Therefore, these three have come to be known in Jaina ethics as the three gems (triratna) that shine in a good life. A person whose life is adorned with these three gems becomes free from bondage to matter and attains liberation. Being free from the obstacles of matter, his soul realises its inherent potentiality. It attains the fourfold perfection (ananta catuṣṭaya), namely, infinite knowledge, infinite faith, infinite power and infinite bliss.

#### 9. *Not God, but Liberated Souls are Objects of Worship*

The Jainas reject the belief in God as groundless. For them, the idea of God as an eternally perfect being is meaningless. Perfection means only the removal of imperfection, and it is meaningless to call a being perfect who was never imperfect. Though the Jainas thus deny God, as the creator of the world, they think it necessary to mediate on and worship the liberated, perfect souls (siddhas) for guidance and inspiration in one's religious life. The liberated souls possessing God-like perfections



take the place of God in Jainism. But the liberated souls serve only as beacon lights. They are not worshipped for mercy and pardon. By meditating on their pure qualities, the Jaina purifies his mind and strengthens his heart for the uphill journey to liberation. Every one must work out his own salvation by controlling his passions, senses, thought, speech and action in the light of right knowledge. This is why the liberated soul is called a victor (jina) and a hero (vīra). Jainism is a religion of self-help, like Buddhism, the Sāṅkhya and the Advaita Vedānta.

## CHAPTER V

## THE NYĀYA-VAIŚEṢIKA PHILOSOPHY

1. *Introduction*

The Nyāya system was founded by Gotama who was also known as Gautama and Akṣapāda. The Vaiśeṣika system was founded by Kaṇāda. The Nyāya and the Vaiśeṣika are allied systems of philosophy (samānatānta), and so may be treated together. They have the same end in view, namely, liberation of the individual self. According to both, ignorance is the root cause of all misery and suffering; and liberation, which consists in their absolute cessation, is to be attained through a right knowledge of reality.

2. *Reality is a Plurality of Many Independent Objects*

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika theory of reality is pluralistic realism. It believes in many independent realities such as the four kinds of atoms of earth, water, fire and air, time, space, ether (ākāśa), minds and souls including both the individual self (jīvātmā) and the supreme self (paramātmā). These reals are called substances and they are all eternal and uncreated. While the atoms of earth, etc. and minds are indivisible and infinitesimal, time, space, ether and souls are eternal and infinite substances. There are also other real objects such as quality, action or motion, genus or the class-essence (sāmānya), particularity or specific individuality (viśeṣa), the relation of inherence (samavāya), and



non-existence (abhāva). Some of them are dependent realities, while others are eternal and independent.

### 3. *The Physical World is created, maintained and destroyed by God*

The physical world includes only those objects which are either physical (bhūta) or somehow belong to the world of physical nature. The self, its quality of consciousness, and mind are not at all physical. Time and space, although different from the physical substances, yet somehow belong to the physical world. Ākāśa or ether is a physical substance which is not the productive cause of anything. The physical world is constituted by the four physical elements of earth, water, fire and air. The ultimate constituents of these four elements are the eternal and unchanging atoms of earth, water, fire and air. These four kinds of atoms and the five substances of ether, space, time, mind and soul can neither be created nor destroyed, because they are all eternal and indestructible. Hence the creation of the world means the composition and ordering of the composite objects of the physical world, which are subject to origin and destruction in time. So also the destruction of the world means the decomposition and dissolution of the composite physical objects into their constituent atoms. God creates the world in the sense that it is His will to create that first sets in motion the ultimate constituent atoms of earth, water, fire and air, and directs their operations and combinations so as to produce the four physical elements and all other composite physical objects including organic bodies, sense organs, and the sensible qualities of



things. God maintains the world in the sense that He keeps it going and preserves its order. So also God destroys the world in the sense that it is His will to destroy that sets in motion the constituent atoms of the composite objects and disintegrates them into isolated atoms. But God's creative and destructive will has reference to and is guided by the moral deserts of individual souls. He creates and orders the world as a moral stage in which individual souls may get their proper share of the experiences of pleasure and pain in accordance with their merit and demerit, and ultimately attain their destined goal of liberation through a series of lives in the world. God creates and destroys the world in so far as the ultimate source of the motions of atoms, which compose or decompose the composite objects of the world, is to be found in the creative or the destructive will of God. He also directs the operations of atoms according to the moral deserts of individual souls and with reference to the moral and spiritual ends of their lives.

#### 4. *God is the Supreme Self*

God is the supreme Being who creates, maintains and finally destroys the world. He does not create the world out of nothing, but out of eternal atoms, space, time, ether, minds and souls. He is the first efficient cause of the world, not its material cause, i.e., He builds up the ordered universe out of given material. He is also the preserver of the world in so far as the world is kept in existence by the will of God. So also He is the destroyer who lets loose the forces of destruction when the exigencies of the moral world require it. God is one, infinite and eternal, since the world of space and time, minds and souls does not limit Him,



but is related to Him as His body. He is omnipotent, although He is guided in His activities by moral considerations of the merit and demerit of human actions. He is omniscient in so far as He has full knowledge of all things and events. Eternal and infinite consciousness is an inseparable *attribute* of God as the supreme self. He possesses all perfections and is the moral governor of all living beings including ourselves. Just as a wise and benevolent father directs his son to do such things as are suited to his gifts and capacities, so God directs all living beings to do such actions and feel such natural consequences thereof as are consistent with their past conduct and character. While man is the efficient instrumental cause of his actions, God is their directive cause (*prayojaka-kartā*). He is the impartial dispenser of the fruits of our actions (*karma-phaladātā*), and the supreme arbiter of our joys and sorrows.

#### 5. *The Individual Self is a Pure Immaterial Substance*

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika is, after all, a philosophy of life and seeks to guide individual selves in their search for truth and freedom from bondage. According to it, the individual self is a unique substance, to which all cognitions, feelings and volitions belong as its attributes. Desire, aversion and volition, pleasure, pain and cognition are all qualities of the soul. These cannot belong to the physical substances, since they are not physical qualities perceived by the external senses. Hence we must admit that they are the peculiar properties of some substance different from all physical substances. The self is indestructible and eternal. It is infinite or all-pervading (*vibhu*), since it is not limited by



space and time. There are different selves in different bodies.

The body or the senses cannot be the self, because consciousness cannot be the attribute of the material body or the senses. The body is, by itself, unconscious and unintelligent. The senses cannot explain the mental functions of memory, imagination, thought, etc., which are independent of the senses. A man may lose a limb of the body or a sense organ, and yet remain the same self. Nor can the mind take the place of the self, for the mind is atomic and, therefore, imperceptible. If the mind were the self, the qualities of pleasure and pain which belong to the self must be as imperceptible as the mind. But pleasure and pain are actually perceived by us. Nor can the self be identified with the series of cognitions or ideas as has been done by the Buddhists. If there be no permanent soul, memory would become inexplicable, for no member of the series can, like a bead of the rosary, know what has preceded it or what will succeed it. Nor can the self be said to be mere consciousness as the Advaita Vedāntins suppose. For there is no consciousness which is not related to some subject and object. Hence the self is not consciousness as such, but a subject of consciousness, or a substance having consciousness as its attribute. Although consciousness belongs to the self as an attribute, yet it is not an essential and inseparable attribute of it. All conscious states arise in the self when it is related to the mind, and the mind is related to the senses, and the senses come in contact with external objects. Otherwise, there will be no consciousness in the self. In its disembodied condition, therefore, the self will have no consciousness. Thus the attribute of consciousness is an accidental attribute of the self, the



accident being its relation to the body. The embodied self is no doubt a subject of consciousness, a knower, an ego or the 'I' (aham) and also an enjoyer (bhokta). But when released from bondage to the body, the self is neither a knower nor an ego or 'I', nor an enjoyer or sufferer. It exists as a pure substance bereft of all cognitions, feelings, desires and volitions, in short, of all consciousness.

#### 6. *Liberation is the Complete Cessation of all Suffering*

In the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophy liberation (apavarga) is a state of negation, complete and absolute, of all pain and suffering. It is a state of absolute freedom from all suffering. This implies that it is a state in which the soul is released from all the bonds of its connection with the body and the senses. So long as the soul exists in a body, it is impossible for it to attain the state of complete freedom from pain. The body and the senses being there, we cannot possibly prevent their contact with undesirable and unpleasant objects, and so must submit to the inevitable experience of pain. Hence in liberation the soul must be free from the shackles of the body and the senses. But this cannot be, so long as the soul is born in this world and owns a body for itself. Hence to be liberated, one must stop rebirth in the world. This can be done through right knowledge of the self and the world (tattvajñāna). One must know the self as distinct from the body, the mind and the senses. For this a man must first listen to the scriptural instructions about the self (śravaṇa). Then, he should become convinced of the reality of the self by means of reasoning (manana). Finally, he should meditate on the self in conformity with the principles of yoga (nidi-



dhyāsaṇa). These help him to realise the true nature of the self as distinct from the body and all other objects. With this realisation, the wrong knowledge that 'I am the body' is destroyed, and a man ceases to be moved to action by passions and impulses. His actions being free from desires and impulses, he is not affected by the effects of his present actions. And his past karmas or deeds being exhausted by producing their effects, the individual has to undergo no more birth in this world. The cessation of birth means the end of his connection with the body and, consequently, of all pain and suffering; and that is liberation.

In liberation the soul being severed from the body ceases to have not only painful but also pleasurable experiences, nay more, it ceases to have any experience or consciousness. So in liberation the self exists as a pure substance free from all connection with the body, neither suffering pain, nor enjoying pleasure, nor having consciousness even. Liberation is the negation of pain, not in the sense of a suspension of it for a longer or shorter period of time as in deep sleep. It is absolute freedom from pain for all time to come. It is just that supreme condition of life of the soul which has been described in the scriptures as 'freedom from fear' (abhayaṁ), 'freedom from change and decay' (ajaraṁ), 'freedom from death' (amṛtyupadaṁ), and 'attainment' of the bliss of Brahman'. But the older Naiyāyikas do not accept the idea of liberation as bliss. Some later Naiyāyikas, however, hold that liberation is the soul's final deliverance from pain and attainment of eternal bliss.



## CHAPTER VI

## THE SĀṆKHYA-YOGA PHILOSOPHY

1. *Introduction*

The Sāṅkhya system is the work of the great sage Kapila. The Yoga system was founded by the sage Patañjali and is also known as the Pātañjala system after the name of its founder. The Sāṅkhya and the Yoga must be very old systems of philosophy. The Sāṅkhya tendency of thought pervades all the literature of ancient India including the Śrutis or the Vedas, the Smṛtis and the Purāṇas. So also the importance of yoga practices for self-realisation is recognised in the Upaniṣads, the Smṛtis, the Purāṇas and in almost all the systems of Indian philosophy. The Sāṅkhya is sometimes described as the atheistic Sāṅkhya, (nirīśvara-sāṅkhya), as distinguished from the Yoga which is called the theistic Sāṅkhya (śeśvara-sāṅkhya). The reason for this is that Kapila did not admit the existence of God and also thought that God's existence cannot be proved, while the Yoga believes in the existence of God as the supreme self. The Sāṅkhya and the Yoga being closely related and allied systems of philosophy are here treated together.

2. *There are Two ultimate Realities—Puruṣa and Prakṛti*

The Sāṅkhya-Yoga is a philosophy of dualistic realism. While the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika admits the ultimate reality of many entities—atoms, minds, souls, etc.—the Sāṅkhya-Yoga recognises only two kinds of ultimate realities, namely,



spirit or self and primordial matter (puruṣa and prakṛti). The two exist independently of each other, although prakṛti acts unconsciously for the liberation of puruṣa.

### 3. *Puruṣa is the Eternal and Immortal Self*

According to the Sāṅkhya-Yoga, puruṣa or the self is different from the body and the senses, the mind and the intellect. It is not anything of the world of objects and is above the whole material world. It is neither the body nor the brain, nor the aggregate of conscious states. The self is the conscious subject of experience and can never become an object of knowledge. It is not a substance with the attribute of consciousness, but it is pure consciousness itself. It is not, as the Advaita Vedāntin thinks, a blissful consciousness; bliss and consciousness being different things cannot be the essence of the same thing. The self is the transcendent subject whose essence is pure consciousness. The self ever remains the same, although the objects of knowledge may change and succeed one another. It is a steady constant consciousness in which there is neither any change nor any activity. It is above all change and activity. The self is an uncaused, eternal and all-pervading reality which is really free from all attachment and unaffected by all objects. All change and activity, all pleasures and pains really belong to matter and its products like the body, mind and intellect. It is sheer ignorance to think that the self is the body or the senses, or the mind or the intellect. But when through such ignorance, the self confuses and identifies itself with any of these things, it *seems* to be entangled in change and activity, sorrow and misery.



#### 4. *Prakṛti is the unconscious, First Cause of the World*

The Sāṅkhya doctrine of prakṛti is based on its theory of causation which is known as satkārya-vāda. According to it, an effect exists implicitly in its material cause even before it is produced, and is really a transformation of the cause. Thus oil as an effect pre-exists in mustard seeds and is only made manifest when the seeds are pressed. The objects of the world are limited and dependent things produced by certain causes. The world is a series of effects, and so it must have a cause. Puruṣa or the self cannot be the cause of the world, for it is inactive though conscious and intelligent. Nor can the atoms of earth, water, fire and air be the cause of the objects of the world. Material atoms cannot explain the origin of the finer products of nature like the mind, intellect and ego. So we must seek for a cause that can explain the gross objects of nature like earth and water, trees and seas, as well as its subtle products. Now we find that in the evolution of things, the cause is subtler than the effect and that it pervades the effect, as when a seed develops into a tree. Hence the ultimate cause of the world must be some unconscious material principle which is uncaused, eternal and all-pervading, very fine and always ready to produce the world of objects. This is prakṛti which is also called pradhāna. It is the first cause of all things and, therefore, has itself no cause. As the uncaused root-cause of all objects it is eternal and all-pervading, because nothing that is limited and non-eternal can be the first cause of the world. Being the cause of such subtle things as mind and intellect, prakṛti is a very subtle, mysterious and tremendous power which evolves and dissolves the world in a cyclic order.



### 5. *Prakṛti is constituted by Three Guṇas*

Prakṛti is in itself the unity of three forces called sattva, rajas and tamas, held in a state of equilibrium. We find that in every object of the world there are three tendencies or potencies. Every object possesses the powers of producing pleasure, pain and indifference in relation to different persons. They have also the capacity to manifest themselves, the power to move and act, and the tendency to obstruct manifestation and retard activity and motion. Now the characters and powers of the effect must be present in a subtle form in the cause. Hence prakṛti as the ultimate material cause of the objects of the world must be constituted by the three powers of producing pleasure, manifestation and the like, of causing pain, activity, motion, etc., and of producing indifference, inertia and the like. These three powers are respectively called sattva, rajas and tamas; and they constitute prakṛti like the three strands of a rope. Although they are called *guṇas*, they are not qualities, but substantive powers or forces lying dormant and equipoised in the heart of prakṛti, the ultimate ground and matrix out of which the whole world of objects is evolved, and into which it is finally dissolved.

### 6. *Prakṛti is the Cause of the World's Evolution*

Prakṛti evolves the world of objects when it comes in contact (*saṁyoga*) with the puruṣa. The evolution of the world cannot be due to the puruṣa or self alone, for it is inactive; nor can it be due to prakṛti alone, for it is unconscious and unintelligent. The activity of prakṛti must be guided by the intelligence of puruṣa, if there is to be any



evolution of an ordered world. Puruṣa, however, does not *act* on prakṛti. It is the mere presence of puruṣa that moves prakṛti to act, just as the presence of a magnet moves a piece of iron. With the contact between puruṣa and prakṛti, there is a disturbance of the equilibrium in which the guṇas are held together in prakṛti before creation. It is rajas, which is naturally active, that is disturbed first, and then, through it, the other guṇas begin to vibrate. This produces a tremendous commotion in the infinite bosom of prakṛti, and each of the three guṇas tries to preponderate over the other two. As a result of the combination of the guṇas in different proportions, the various objects of the world are evolved from prakṛti. The first product of the evolution of prakṛti is mahat or buddhi which in its cosmic aspect is the great germ of this vast world, and in its psychological aspect is a sort of awakening of prakṛti from her slumber. Out of mahat or buddhi comes ahaṅkāra or the ego which causes the feeling of 'I and mine' in an individual. From ahaṅkāra are evolved manas or the mind, the five sense organs, the five motor organs and the five tanmātras or subtle essences of sound, touch, colour, taste and smell. From these five tanmātras arise the five gross elements of ether, air, fire, water and earth respectively.

The evolution of the world is a play of twenty-four principles (caturvīṃśati-tattva) of which prakṛti is the first, the five gross elements are the last, and the thirteen organs (karaṇas, *i.e.* mind, ego, intellect and the ten sense and motor organs) and the five tanmātras are the intermediate ones. But the evolution of prakṛti into a world of objects is not a meaningless play of mechanical forces. On the other hand, it has a spiritual basis and background, and serves the fundamental ends of spiritual life. The ultimate end of the



evolution of prakṛti is liberation (mukti) of the self. It is through a life of moral training in the evolved universe that the self realises its true nature and attains liberation.

7. *Liberation is attained through Discrimination of Puruṣa from Prakṛti*

According to the Sāṅkhya, liberation means the absolute cessation of all pain and suffering for the self. It cannot be a state of happiness or enjoyment. So long as the self is in a body all pleasures are bound to be mixed up with pain. Hence liberation is only the complete and absolute cessation of pain. It is not the experience of pleasure or bliss.

The self is, by its very nature, pure consciousness which is different from the body, the senses, the mind, the intellect and the ego. It is above space, time and causality and, therefore, intrinsically free and immortal. Pleasure and pain really belong to the mind-body organism. The self being distinct from the mind-body is really above all pain and pleasure. But when through ignorance it identifies itself with the mind-body and owns it as a part of itself, it considers itself to be happy or unhappy when the mind-body becomes so. It is this want of discrimination or feeling of identity (aviveka) between the self and the mind-body that is cause of all our troubles. Hence liberation or freedom from suffering is to be attained by means of right discrimination (viveka-jñāna) between the self and the not-self including the body, mind, intellect and the ego. If a man can clearly realise that the self is none of these things and that it is above the whole world of objects, he will no longer be affected by the afflictions of the mind-body. His self



stands liberated and free from all pain and suffering. It is possible for every self to realise itself in this way and thereby attain liberation in this life and in this world (jīvanmukti). After the death of its body, the liberated self attains what is called videhamukti, i.e., emancipation of the spirit from all bodies, gross and subtle.

#### 8. *God is not the Creator of the World*

The main tendency of the Sāṅkhya is to repudiate the belief in any God. Some commentators and interpreters of the Sāṅkhya reject the belief in God on the main ground that God as an eternal and immutable self cannot create the world, for what is unchanging cannot be the active cause of anything. So we are to say that the ultimate cause of the world is the eternal but everchanging prakṛti or primordial matter. Some other commentators of the Sāṅkhya, however, hold that although the existence of God as possessed of creative activity cannot be admitted, yet we must believe in God as the eternally perfect spirit who is the witness of the world and whose mere presence (sannidhi-mātra) moves prakṛti to act and evolve the world. So also the Yoga believes in God as the eternally perfect spirit who brings about the association or dissociation between puruṣa and prakṛti and guides prakṛti to create or destroy the world, according to the moral deserts of individual souls.

#### 9. *The Yoga lays down a Practical Path for Liberation*

The Yoga is closely allied to the Sāṅkhya system. It is the application of the theory of the Sāṅkhya in practical life. It accepts the twenty-five principles of the Sāṅkhya,



but also believes in God as the Supreme Self distinct from other selves. The special interest of this system lies in the practice of yoga as the sure means of attaining viveka-jñāna or discrimination between puruṣa and prakṛti, which is regarded in the Sāṅkhya as the essential condition of liberation.

#### 10. *Yoga means Cessation of Mental Modifications*

In the Pātañjala system yoga means, not union of the individual self with God, but the cessation of all mental modifications (cittavṛttinirodha). The aim of yoga is the realisation of the self's distinction from the mind-body. This is best achieved, if we can have an experience of the self even when the mind completely ceases to function and we have no bodily consciousness. This will convince us that the self is not the mind-body, but quite distinct from it. The practice of yoga helps one to arrest all mental functions and yet have an experience of the self.

#### 11. *There are Five Levels of Mental life*

The mind (citta) is constituted by the elements of sattva, rajas and tamas. According to the preponderance of one or other of these elements, five levels of mental life are distinguished. These are called kṣipta or restless, muḍha or stupified, vikṣipta or distracted, ekāgra or concentrated, and niruddha or restrained. The first three levels are not conducive to yoga, because there is neither complete nor permanent restraint of the mind in them. The fourth and fifth levels of ekāgra and niruddha are conducive to yoga as complete cessation of all mental modifications.



12. *Ekāgra is Saṁprajñāta Samādhi*

The fourth level marks the beginning of prolonged concentration of the mind on any object, and it prepares the way for the cessation of all mental modifications. But even here the mind continues to think of some object, so that all mental processes are not altogether arrested. The state of *ekāgra* or concentration, when permanently established, is called *saṁprajñāta samādhi* or the trance of meditation, in which there is a clear and distinct *consciousness of the object* of contemplation. It is also called *samāpatti* in so far as here the mind is entirely put into the object and assumes the form of the object itself.

13. *Niruddha is Asaṁprajñāta Samādhi*

At the last level, called *niruddha*, there is the cessation of all mental functions including even that of concentration. This state is called *asaṁprajñāta samādhi*, because here all mental modifications being stopped, nothing is known or thought of by the mind. This is the trance of absorption in which all mental processes and objective appearances cease to exist and the mind is left in its pure and original state of calmness and tranquillity. Both *saṁprajñāta* and *asaṁprajñāta samādhis* are known by the common name of *samādhi-yoga* or cessation of mental modifications, since both conduce to self-realisation. But *asaṁprajñāta samādhi* is *yoga par excellence* since it puts a stop to all mental modifications and does not rest on any object at all. It is the final stage of *samādhi* because when it is attained the whole world of objects ceases to affect and exist for the yogin. It is here that the self abides in its own essence as pure consciousness enjoying



the still vision of isolated self-shining existence. To maintain oneself steadily in the state of samādhi, it is necessary to practise yoga for long with care and devotion.

#### 14. *There are Eight Steps in the practice of Yoga*

The practice of yoga consists of eight disciplines, namely, (1) yama or restraint of mind and body, (2) niyama or cultivation of good habits, (3) āsana or the adoption of steady and comfortable bodily posture, (4) prāṇāyāma, *i.e.*, regulated suspension of the breathing processes, (5) pratyāhāra or withdrawal of the senses from their objects, (6) dhāraṇā or steady attention to the desired object, (7) dhyāna or steadfast contemplation of the object without any break, which reveals the reality of the object to the yogin's mind, and (8) samādhi or the mind's concentration on and absorption in the object of contemplation so as to lose itself in the object and have no separate awareness of itself. These eight disciplines are known as aids to yoga (yogāṅga). When practised regularly with devotion, they lead to the attainment of yoga, both saṁprajñāta and asaṁprajñāta. It should be observed here that samādhi as the eighth discipline is different from the samādhi or the yoga defined as the restraint of the mind (cittavṛttinirodha). The former is the *means* for the attainment of the latter which is its *end*, in so far as continued concentration of mind on an object finally results in complete restraint of the mind. Contemplation of God with devotion is the means for the attainment of concentration and restraint of mind. He who is sincerely devoted to God and meditates on Him at all times, attains samādhi in no time.



## CHAPTER VII

## THE MIMĀMSĀ PHILOSOPHY

1. *Introduction*

The Mīmāṃsā (or Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā) system was founded by Jaimini. Its primary object is to defend and justify Vedic ritualism. In course of this attempt it had to find a philosophy supporting the world-view on which ritualism depends.

2. *The Vedas are Eternal and Infallible*

The authority of the Vedas is the basis of ritualism. According to the Mīmāṃsā, the Vedas are eternal and self-existing; the written or pronounced Vedas are only their temporary manifestations through particular seers. The Vedas are not the works of any person, human or divine. The names of certain persons are of course cited along with the Vedic hymns. But they are really the seers (ṛṣis) to whom the hymns were revealed, and not the authors by whom they were composed. The Vedas are indeed composed of words. But words (śabdā) are not really the uttered or heard sounds (dhvanis). The sounds are only the revealers of the words which are not themselves produced. Words are really the letters which are partless and uncaused. When different persons pronounce a letter, like 'K' at different places and times in different ways, we recognise that the *same* letter is pronounced by all of them, although the sounds are different. This shows that the letter is not produced at



any time and place, but transcends them. So the words as letters may be regarded as eternal, that is, as having existence, but being uncaused. Since the Vedas are not the works of any person they are free from all errors and defects to which the works of imperfect persons are subject. The Vedas are, therefore, infallible. It is not also reasonable to hold that the Vedas are the works of the cunning priests meant to deceive ordinary people as the Cārvākas suggest. For had it been so, no one would care to study such deceptive works and hand them down to posterity.

### 3. *The World is real and Eternal*

The Mīmāṃsā believes in the reality of the world with all its diverse objects. In addition to the objects of external perception it believes in souls, heaven, hell and deities to whom sacrifice is to be performed, according to the Vedic commandments. The souls are eternal substances, and so also are the material elements by the combination of which the world is made. The law of karma is sufficient to guide the formation of all objects. There is no necessity to believe in the existence of God to explain the world. There is neither creation nor total destruction of the world. The world has always been as it is. It has neither a beginning nor an end. The world is eternally there. The Mīmāṃsā does not hold like other orthodox systems that there is a cycle of creation and dissolution (kalpa).

### 4. *Souls are Eternal spiritual Substances*

The soul is an eternal, infinite substance, which is related to a real body in a real world, and it survives death



to reap the fruits of its actions performed here. Consciousness is not the essence of the soul, but an adventitious quality which arises only when the soul is associated with the body and the senses come in contact with objects. The soul in its intrinsic state is a substance having existence and a potentiality for consciousness though no actual consciousness. There are as many souls as there are individuals. The souls are subject to bondage and can also obtain liberation. Although life in heaven was regarded as the highest good by the earlier Mīmāṃsākas, liberation replaced heaven later on. The soul's bondage is due to its association with the body including the senses. By the disinterested performance of obligatory duties, as enjoined by the Vedas, and the knowledge of the self one becomes free from the fetters of past karma and is never born again. Such a person is thus liberated. Since in liberation the soul has no body and, therefore, no consciousness, it is conceived as a negative state of cessation of pain, and not as an experience of bliss. Some later Mīmāṃsākas hold, however, that liberation is an experience of joy.

##### 5. *God or gods do not exist: Mantra-Devatās are objects of Sacrifice*

The Mīmāṃsā does not believe in God as a creator of the world. The early Mīmāṃsākas are silent about God and later ones reject the proofs for the existence of God. In its anxiety to secure the supreme place for the eternal Vedas, the Mīmāṃsā could not believe in God whose authority would be superior, or at least equal, to that of the Vedas. According to it, the Vedas embody not so much eternal truths as eternal injunctions or laws which enjoin



the performance of the sacrificial rites. What the Vedas command one to perform is right (dharma). What they forbid is wrong. Our duty consists in doing what is right and desisting from forbidden acts. Duty must be done in the spirit of duty, or for duty's sake. The rituals enjoined by the Vedas should be performed not with the hope of any reward but just because they are so enjoined.

The sacrifices performed in the Vedic times were calculated to please, by oblations and hymns, different deities (the Fire-god, the Sun-god, etc.) either to win some favour or avert some ill. Though the Mīmāṃsā is a continuation of this Vedic cult, it does not believe in the existence of the deities. The Mīmāṃsaka wonders how the same deity can be simultaneously present in different places where he is invoked. The Vedic deities gradually recede and fade into grammatical datives. A deity comes to be described not by its moral or intellectual qualities, but as that which is signified in a sacrificial injunction by the fourth case-ending (the sign of a dative, to which something is given). The deities are not regarded as objects of worship, nor even believed to have any existence anywhere except in the Vedic hymns (mantras) that describe them. The Vedic mantras are really the manifestations of eternal words (śabda). Now these eternal words are eternal stresses or vibrations which are heard as subtle sounds (nāda or dhvani) by the Yogin's subtle ears. The Vedic deities are represented by such subtle sounds which are called root-(vīja) mantras; they are identical with the mantras, *i.e.*, they are the mantras themselves. Hence in a sacrificial rite it is not any deity that is worshipped, but an oblation is offered to the spiritual entity or force that a mantra represents, or rather really is. There may be some grandeur and even purity in such a con-



ception of deities, but one would miss here the living faith of the Vedas. It is here that the Vedānta comes to differ from the Mīmāṃsā, utilising its faith in the Vedas to develop a still greater faith in God, as we shall see in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE VEDĀNTA PHILOSOPHY

#### I. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we propose to give a brief account of the three more popular schools of the Vedānta as developed by Saṅkara, Rāmānuja and Madhva. Of them, the Advaita of Saṅkara is the leading school of the Vedānta. In fact what ordinarily passes now-a-days as the Vedānta is really the Advaita Vedānta of the Saṅkara school. In point of popularity the Viśiṣṭādvaita school of Rāmānuja and the Dvaita school of Madhva come next to the Advaita school of Saṅkara and should be treated along with it. The other schools of the Vedānta, namely, the Suddhādvaita of Vallabha, the Dvaitādvaita of Nimbārka, the Bhedābheda of Bhāskara, the Acintya-Bhedābheda of Sri Caitanya and so on are more or less modifications of the first three to effect some sort of synthesis between them. But before we proceed to an exposition of these three schools of the Vedānta we should consider the development of the Vedānta through the Vedas and the Upaniṣads.

#### 1. 'Vedānta' literally means 'the end of the Vedas'

'Vedānta' literally means 'the end of the Vedas'. The word primarily stood for the Upaniṣads which might be regarded as the end of the Vedas in different senses. First, the Upaniṣads were the last literary products of the Vedic period. Secondly, in the order of Scriptural studies, the



Upaniṣads come last, the Saṁhitās being studied first and the Brāhmaṇas next. Thirdly, the Upaniṣads mark the culmination of the Vedic speculation, the highest development of the Vedic thought. Though Vedānta originally meant the Upaniṣads, it subsequently included all thoughts developed out of the Upaniṣads.

2. 'Upaniṣad' means 'that which gets man near to God, or to the teacher.'

The word 'Upaniṣad' means 'that which gets man near to God', or 'that which gets man near to the teacher'. The last meaning tallies with the fact that the Upaniṣadic doctrines were esoteric, i.e. they were very secretly taught only to some select pupils seated close to the teacher. The Upaniṣads were regarded as the inner or secret meanings of the Vedas, hence their teachings were sometimes called Vedopaniṣad or the mystery of the Vedas.<sup>1</sup> The Upaniṣads were many in number and developed in the different Vedic schools (śākhās) at different times and places.<sup>2</sup> The problems discussed and solutions offered by the Upaniṣads presented differences in spite of a unity of general outlook. Bādarāyaṇa in his *Brahma-sūtra* made an attempt to systematise and harmonise the different teachings. Later on different commentators gave different interpretations to the sūtras and the Upaniṣadic texts or śrutis. Thus arose the different schools of the Vedānta.

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 1.2.

<sup>2</sup> Vide S. N. Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 28, for a list of 112 Upaniṣads.



### 3. *Important Elements of the Vedānta are found in the R̥g-Veda*

Of the three Vedas, R̥k, Yajus and Sāma, the first is the basic work, the second two contain R̥k hymns (mantras) in different arrangements to suit their application to sacrifices. The hymns of the R̥g-veda mostly consist of praises of the different deities Agni, Mitra, Varuṇa, Indra, and so on. They describe the mighty and noble deeds of the various deities, and pray for their help and favour. These deities were conceived as the realities underlying the different phenomena of nature, such as fire, sun, wind, rain and others, on which life, agriculture and prosperity depended. Nature, though peopled with different gods, was conceived as subject to some basic law, called R̥ta, by which the whole world, objects of nature as well as living beings, was regulated. Its function was not only the preservation or order and regularity in planets and other objects, but also the regulation of justice.

### 4. *Belief in the Unity of the gods in One Supreme God*

One peculiarity of the Vedic faith in gods is that each of the many gods, when praised, is extolled by the hymn as the supreme God, the creator of the universe and the lord of all gods. Further, in the R̥g-veda we come across passages where it is explicitly stated that the different gods are only manifestations of one underlying reality. "The one reality is called by the wise in different ways: Agni, Yama, Mātariśvā."<sup>1</sup> The Vedic faith in gods is thus a distinct

<sup>1</sup> 'Ekaṁ sad viprā bahudhā vadanti . . .', *R̥g-veda*, 1.164.46.



type of monotheism which is different from other forms of it like the Christian and the Mahommedan. This peculiarity of the Vedic faith persists in Indian monotheism through the ages. Even in its most developed form, Indian monotheism retains the belief that though God is one, He has various manifestations in the many gods, any one of which may be worshipped as a form of the Supreme Deity. Even to-day we have in India the divergent cults—Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, Śāktism, etc.—flourishing side by side and almost every one of them is at bottom based on a philosophy of one Supreme God, perhaps even one all-inclusive reality. Indian monotheism, from the Vedic age down to the present, has believed rather in the unity of the gods in God, than the denial of gods for God.

### 5. *Belief in the Unity of all Existence*

Belief in the unity of all gods is in the Ṛg-veda part of a greater thought, namely, the unity of all existence. In the famous Puruṣasūkta, the Vedic seer visualises, perhaps for the first time in human history, the organic unity of the whole universe. All existence—earth, heavens, planets, gods, living and non-living objects—is conceived here as the parts of one great person (Puruṣa), who *pervades* the world, but also remains beyond it. We have here an insight not only into the universe as one organic whole, but also into the Supreme Reality which is both immanent in the world and transcendent to it; God pervades the world, He remains also beyond it.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ṛg-veda*, 10.90.



### 6. *The Conception of an Impersonal Absolute*

In the Nāsadiya-sūkta we are introduced further to the Vedic conception of an Impersonal Absolute. It says that the reality underlying all existence cannot be described either as non-existent or as existent (na asat, no sat).<sup>1</sup> Here we have perhaps the first flash of a conception of the Indeterminate Absolute, which is the reality underlying all things, but is in itself indescribable.

### 7. *Relation between Personal God and the Impersonal Absolute*

As for the relation between the conception of Ultimate Reality as a person and the conception of it as an Indeterminate Absolute, we may note that even in the description of Reality as Person, there is also a mention of its transcendent aspect which is not describable in terms of the objects of the world, and is, therefore, indeterminate. They are thus conceived as the two aspects of the same Reality.

### 8. *Vedānta as a Philosophy begins in the Upaniṣads*

In the Rg-veda Vedāntic thoughts are presented in a poetic way and are not supported by arguments on which philosophical conclusions must be based. There is, therefore, no philosophy proper in the Vedas. The first attempt at philosophical speculation is to be found in the Upaniṣads, where problems about self, God and the world are clearly put and discussed.

<sup>1</sup> *Rg-veda*, 10.129.



### 9. *The Upaniṣads shift the centre of interest from gods to the Self*

The main problems often discussed in the Upaniṣads are: What is the Reality from which all things originate, by which all live and into which all dissolve when destroyed? What is that by knowing which everything can be known? What is that by knowing which the unknown becomes known? What is that by knowing which one can attain immortality? What is Brahman? What is Ātman? The Upaniṣadic mind cherished the belief that there is an all-pervasive reality underlying all things, and that there is some reality by *knowing* which *immortality can be attained*. The name given to this reality is sometimes Brahman, sometimes Ātman, sometimes simply sat or being. The Upaniṣads shift the centre of interest from the Vedic gods to the Self of man. The real Self is pure consciousness which is different from the body, the senses, the mind, the intellect and all changing states and processes of the mind-body. These are the sheaths (koṣas), the outer covers which conceal the inner, permanent self, though all of these are grounded in it and are its manifestations.<sup>1</sup> The Real Self is called Ātman. As infinite, conscious reality (satyaṁ, jñānaṁ, anantaṁ) the Self of man is identical with the Self of all beings (sarva-bhūtātma) and, therefore, with God or Brahman.

### 10. *Self-realization is the Highest Knowledge*

Realisation of the Self (ātma-vidyā) is regarded in the Upaniṣads as the highest of all knowledge (parā-vidyā), all

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 8.12.



other knowledge and learning being inferior to it (*aparā-vidyā*). The method of self-realisation lies through the control of the lower self and through study, reasoning and repeated meditation (*śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*) on the truths of the Vedānta. It requires one to reject what is pleasant (*preyas*) for what is good (*śreyas*).

### 11. *Rituals are inadequate for the Attainment of Immortality*

The Vedic belief in sacrifices is shaken by the Upaniṣads which declare that with these one can at best secure a temporary abode in Heaven, but not the highest goal of immortality.<sup>1</sup> It is only through the realisation of the Self or Brahman that one can be free from bondage to the world and attain immortality. One who truly realises his unity with the Immortal Brahman, realises immortality.

### 12. *Brahman is the Ultimate Source of all Joy*

The Upaniṣads conceive Brahman not only as pure being and consciousness, but also as the ultimate source of all joy. Worldly pleasures are only the distorted fragments of that joy, just as worldly objects are limited manifestations of the reality of Brahman.<sup>2</sup> One who realises his identity with Brahman has an ineffable experience of infinite joy.

### 13. *Self-realisation is the Greatest Joy*

That the Self or Brahman is the source of all joy becomes evident (says Yājñavalkya to his wife Maitreyī) from the fact

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 1.2.7.

<sup>2</sup> *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.3.32.



that it is the dearest thing to man. One loves another person or thing because he identifies himself with that person or thing, *regarding him or it as his own self*, finding his self in them. All is dear because of the Self.<sup>1</sup> That the Self in itself is bliss is also shown by the fact that when a man falls into deep sleep, forgets his relation with the body, the senses and the external world and thus retires into his own intrinsic state, he is at peace, he is untouched by pleasure and pain. To feel at one with the Self is to be one with the Infinite God, the Immortal, the Infinite Joy. Nothing then remains unattained, nothing left to be desired.

14. *Different views of God and the World in different Upaniṣads lead to different Schools of Vedānta*

As already stated, the Upaniṣads presented marked differences of views on certain points in spite of a unity of general outlook. Thus in some Upaniṣads we find a description of God or Brahman as a determinate, personal Being possessed of various good and great qualities.<sup>2</sup> In others we find passages where Brahman is described as a Reality having no qualities and being perfectly indeterminate and indescribable, even unthinkable. Brahman cannot be an object of worship even.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, with regard to the relation between Brahman and the world, we find passages where creation of the world out of Brahman would appear to be real and Brahman a real creator. But in many places we are told that there is no multiplicity here, that one who sees the many here is doomed to death, and that in all objects there

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.5.6.

<sup>2</sup> Vide *Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 6.8.

<sup>3</sup> *Kena Upaniṣad*, 1.4.5.



is the same reality, and their differences are merely verbal.<sup>1</sup>

These two different kinds of statements about the world and God or Brahman naturally present problems, as to the real views of the Upaniṣads. Subsequent Vedānta treatises take up these problems for solution. The *Brahma-sūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa attempts to systematise and ascertain the real views of the Upaniṣads. But his sūtras, being brief, admit of different interpretations. Different commentators on the *Brahma-sūtra* give different interpretations to the Upaniṣads and the sūtras very clearly and elaborately. The different schools of Vedānta, mentioned before, came into existence in this way.

#### 15. *Different Views of the relation between the Self and Brahman in different Schools of Vedānta*

The main question on which the schools of the Vedānta are divided is: What is the nature of the relation between the individual self (jīva) and God (Brahman)? Some, like Madhva, hold that the self and God are two totally different realities; their view is called dualism (dvaita). Some others, like Saṅkara, hold that the two are absolutely identical; this view is known as monism (advaita). Some others, like Rāmānuja, again hold that the two are related like part and whole; this view may be called qualified monism (viśiṣṭādvaita). There were many other views held in other schools of the Vedānta, and each of them specified a particular type of identity (abheda), difference (bheda) or identity-in-difference (bhedābheda) between the self and God. But the more widely known among the Vedānta schools are those of

<sup>1</sup> *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.4.19; *Chhāndogya Upaniṣad*, 6.1.



Saṅkara, Rāmānuja and Madhva. These we shall explain here one after another.

## II. THE MONISM OF SĀṆKARA (ADVĀITA)

The monism of Saṅkara is based on his interpretation of the *Brahma-sūtra* and the Upaniṣads. To him, the Upaniṣadic account of creation cannot be harmonised with the denial of multiplicity, if it meant the real creation of a real world. Nor, again, can the description of Brahman as indeterminate and qualityless (nirguṇa) be reconciled with that of Brahman as determinate and qualified by attributes. Saṅkara tries to reconcile these apparent contradictions in his interpretation of the Vedānta.

### 1. *The World is a mere Appearance due to Māyā*

The world of our ordinary sense experience is a system of many living and non-living objects. But the Upaniṣads teach that there is no multiplicity here, and the world of many disappears with the dawn of the knowledge of Reality. This is possible only if the world be an appearance, and not a reality, for the knowledge of Reality can dispel only the unreal appearing as real, not what is really real. The world, therefore, is regarded by Saṅkara as a mere appearance, *like* an object in dream or illusion. Even in the Rg-veda<sup>1</sup> the one Indra (God) is said to appear in many forms through powers of creating illusion (māyā). Some Upaniṣads also accept this idea.<sup>2</sup> The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad clearly states that the origin (prakṛti) of the world

<sup>1</sup> Rg-veda, 6.47.18.

<sup>2</sup> Vide *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 2.5.19 and Saṅkara thereon.



lies in the magical power (māyā) of God.<sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara follows this line of thought and regards the world as the illusory creation of the magical power (māyā) of God (Brahman).

## 2. *Māyā is magical power in God and Ignorance in Man*

Māyā as a power of God is indistinguishable from God, just as the burning power of fire is from the fire itself. It is by this that God conjures up the world-show with all its wonderful objects. For God, māyā is only the will to create the appearance of the world. It does not affect God, does not deceive Him.<sup>2</sup> For ignorant people like us, who are deceived by it and see the many objects here instead of one Brahman or God, māyā is an illusion-producing ignorance. An ordinary illusion, say, of a snake in a rope, is due to our *ignorance* of the reality behind the appearance, *i.e.*, the rope. If we could know the rope as the rope, there would be no illusion about it. The ignorance creating the illusion does not simply conceal from our view the real nature of the rope, but positively distorts it, *i.e.*, makes it appear as something else. So māyā as producing the illusion of a world in us is also called *ajñāna* or *avidyā*, *i.e.*, ignorance. It has the double function of concealing the real nature of Brahman, and making Him appear as something else, namely, the world. In so far as māyā *positively* produces some illusory appearance, it is called positive ignorance (*bhāva-rūpaṁ ajñānaṁ*); and in so far as no beginning can be assigned to the world, māyā is also said to be beginningless (*anādi*). The appearance of this world is taken as real by the ignorant,

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 4.10 and Śaṅkara thereon.

<sup>2</sup> *Brahma-sūtra*, 2.1.9 and Śaṅkara thereon.



but the wise who can see through it find nothing but God, the one Reality behind the illusory show. For them, there is no illusion nor, therefore, illusion-producing māyā. God to them is not, therefore, the wielder of māyā at all.

### 3. *Māyā and the World are neither Real nor Unreal*

Māyā as the magical power of creation in God cannot be described as either real or unreal. It cannot be called unreal because it produces the appearance of a world of many objects. Nor can it be called real because it is contradicted and cancelled by the knowledge of reality, i.e., Brahman. So also the world of appearance cannot be described as either real or unreal. It cannot be called real because it is changing and impermanent, but it is not utterly unreal like the son of a barren woman, since it exists as a fact and is perceived by us. Both the world of appearance and the power of māyā which conjures up such a puzzling world are indescribable (anirvacanīya) in this sense.

### 4. *God in relation to the World is called Saguṇa Brahman or Īśvara*

Brahman, according to Śaṅkara, can be conceived from two different points of view. If we look at Brahman from the empirical or practical standpoint (vyāvahārika-dṛṣṭi) from which the world is real, Brahman may be regarded as the Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer of the world and, therefore, as possessed of the qualities of omnipotence, omniscience, etc. He then appears as Saguṇa Brahman and is called Īśvara in Śaṅkara's philosophy. He is also the object of worship. But this description does not give us the essential



nature (svarūpa-lakṣaṇa) of Brahman. It is true so long as the world is believed to be real. But the world is conceived by Śaṅkara as an appearance which rests on our ignorance. So the description of Brahman as saguṇa gives only His relative and accidental character (tatastha-lakṣaṇa), it does not touch His essence.

5. *God in Himself is Pure Existence-Consciousness-Bliss*

But we can look at God also from a non-worldly point of view (pāramārthika-dṛṣṭi) and try to dissociate Him from the characters which we ascribe to Him from the point of view of the world. We then have a view of God as pure existence-consciousness-bliss (sat-cit-ānanda). The description of God, given in some Upaniṣads<sup>1</sup> as conscious, real, infinite (satyaṁ, jñānaṁ, anantaṁ), as supreme knowledge and bliss (vijñānaṁ, ānandaṁ) is an attempt to describe His essence, (svarūpa) from the transcendental standpoint. God in this aspect of what He really is, without any reference to the world, is called by Śaṅkara Parambrahma or the Supreme God.

6. *Brahman as transcendent Reality is Indeterminate*

Brahman from the transcendental standpoint cannot be described by qualities which relate to the world. Brahman in this aspect is devoid of all distinctions, external as well as internal (sajātiya, vijātiya and svagata). Brahman, in this absolutely transcendent aspect, says Śaṅkara, cannot be described at all and it is, therefore, called indeterminate or

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 2.1; *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, 2.9.28.



characterless (nirguṇa). Even the description of Brahman as real, conscious, infinite cannot directly convey the idea of Brahman. It only serves to direct the mind towards Brahman by denying of it finiteness, unreality and unconsciousness.<sup>1</sup>

7. *The view of Brahman as Saguṇa leads to that of Brahman as Nirguṇa*

Brahman as creator of the world is immanent in the world and yet He is beyond the world and transcendent to it. The world, so long as it appears, is in Brahman, the only Reality, just as the snake illusorily perceived in the rope exists nowhere else except in the rope. But Brahman is not really touched by the imperfections of the world just as the rope is not affected by any illusory characters of the snake. The view of Brahman as immanent leads to that of Brahman as transcendent. It is only through the lower standpoint that we can rise to the higher. The worship of Saguṇa Brahman helps, through purification of the heart,<sup>1</sup> the realisation of Nirguṇa Brahman which is the highest truth.

8. *The Self is Absolutely Identical with Brahman*

Śaṅkara believes in unqualified monism. For him, all distinctions between objects and objects, the subject and the object, the self and God are the illusory creation of māyā. He accepts, therefore, without any reservation, the identity of the individual Soul and Brahman. The self (jīva) is verily Brahman and is nothing other than Brahman.

<sup>1</sup> Vide Śaṅkara's commentary on *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 2.1.



That the Self is identical with Brahman becomes clear when we consider the essential nature of the Self. The essence of the Self must remain the same in all changes, otherwise the Self would cease to be Self. Now in the states of waking, dream and dreamless sleep through which our ordinary consciousness may pass, what persists is consciousness *as such*, whereas the different states of consciousness change and perish. We find, therefore, that pure consciousness is the real essence of the Self. And this pure consciousness is the same as pure existence and bliss. Pure consciousness is or exists as such, though not as particular modes or forms of existence. It is free from all limitations of the body, the mind and the ego. As such, it is bliss itself. Brahman also, we have seen, is pure existence-consciousness-bliss. Thus the Self and Brahman are identical in essence.

9. *Bondage is the Self's association with the body through Ignorance*

Owing to ignorance, the individual self erroneously associates itself with the body, gross and subtle. This is called bondage. In this state it forgets that it is really Brahman. It behaves like a finite, limited, miserable being which runs after transitory worldly objects and is pleased to get them, sorry to miss them. It identifies itself with a finite body and mind, and thinks of itself as the 'ego' or 'I' (*aham*). The ego is not, therefore, the real self, but is only an apparent limitation of it imposed by ignorance (*avidyā*).

10. *Realisation of the Identity between the Self and Brahman is Liberation from Bondage*

The study of the Vedānta helps man dispel the ignorance which causes bondage. The preparation necessary



for this, according to Śaṅkara, is not the study of the Mīmāṃsā, which rests on the conception of the distinction between the worshipper and the worshipped. To undertake the study of the Vedānta one should be able to discriminate between the eternal and the non-eternal (viveka), should give up all desires for enjoyment of objects here and hereafter (virāga), should control his mind and senses (śamadamādi); and lastly one should have an ardent desire for liberation (mumukṣutva).

With such preparation of the intellect, emotion and will one should begin to study the Vedānta with a teacher who has himself realised Brahman. The method of study is threefold; it consists in listening to the teacher's instructions (śravaṇa); reflecting on them to remove all doubts and generate conviction in them (manana); and repeated meditation of the truths thus accepted (nididhyāsana). When through long-continued meditation, belief in the truths of the Vedānta becomes permanent, the seeker after liberation is told by the teacher 'Thou art Brahman'. He begins then to contemplate this truth steadfastly till at last he has an immediate realisation of the truth in the form 'I am Brahman'. Thus the illusory distinction between the self and Brahman at last disappears and bondage, too, along with it. Liberation (mukti) is thus attained.

#### 11. *Liberation is possible even when the Soul is in the Body*

The liberated soul may continue to live in the body because it is the product of karmas which had already begun to produce their effects (prārabdha-karma). But the liberated soul does never again identify itself with the body. The world still appears before him, but he is not deceived by it.



He does not feel any desire for the world's objects and is not, therefore, affected by the world's misery. He is in the world and yet out of it. This conception of Saṅkara has become known in later Vedānta as jīvanmukti.

### 12. *Liberation is not a new Product*

The attainment of liberation does not mean the production of anything new which was not there before. It is only the realisation of the identity between self and Brahman, which is always real, though not always recognised. It is like the finding of the necklace on the neck by one who forgot its existence there and searched for it hither and thither.

### 13. *Liberation is positive Bliss*

Liberation is not merely the absence of all misery due to the illusory sense of distinction between the self and God. It is a state of positive bliss (ānanda), because Brahman is bliss and liberation is identity with Brahman. He who realises his identity with Brahman enjoys the peace and bliss that Brahman is.

### 14. *Liberation is not inconsistent with Selfless Work*

Although the liberated soul has no desires for the world's objects and no ends of his own to fulfil, yet he can do all kinds of disinterested works to serve his fellow beings, especially suffering humanity. Such work will not cause bondage to him, because it is done without any attachment. It is only work performed with attachment that fetters a



man. Saṅkara attaches great importance to disinterested work. For one who is in ignorance and bondage, it is necessary for self-purification and self-enlightenment. Even for one who has obtained perfect knowledge or liberation, selfless work is necessary for the good of those who are still in bondage.<sup>1</sup> The life of a liberated man should be worthy of imitation by the people at large. Inactivity or activity that would mislead them should be avoided by him. Social service is not, therefore, thought by Saṅkara to be incompatible with the perfect life, but rather desirable. In his own life of intense social service he follows this ideal. This ideal is also advocated with great force and ardour by Svāmī Vivekānanda, the world-renowned Vedāntist of modern India.<sup>2</sup>

### III. THE QUALIFIED MONISM OF RĀMĀNUJA (VIŚIṢṬĀDVAITA)

The Viśiṣṭādvaita of Rāmānuja is the outcome of his interpretation of the Vedānta sūtras and the Upaniṣads. He interprets them in a way which is different from that of Saṅkara and leads him to the conception of one ultimate Reality (advaita) as possessed of diverse qualities (viśiṣṭa), and not devoid of all qualities as maintained by Saṅkara.

#### 1. *The World is a Real Creation of God*

Rāmānuja takes the Upaniṣadic accounts of creation in a literal sense. He holds that God or Brahman, who is omnipotent, creates the manifold world out of unconscious matter (acit) which exists in God and forms, along with the

<sup>1</sup> Vide Saṅkara's *Bhāṣya* on the *Bhagavad-gītā*, 4.14, 3.20-26 and *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Vide his *Practical Vedānta*.



finite spirits (cit), a part of God Himself. As the source of all material objects, matter is called prakṛti (i.e. root or origin), and this prakṛti is admitted to be an uncreated (aja), eternal reality. But unlike the Sāṅkhya prakṛti, it is a part of God and controlled by God just as the human body is controlled from within by the human soul. During the state of dissolution (pralaya) prakṛti remains in God in a latent, subtle and undifferentiated form. God creates the world of diverse objects out of this prakṛti in accordance with the deeds (karmas) of the souls in the world prior to the last dissolution.

2. *The Upaniṣads do not deny the reality but Independence of the many objects*

As regards the Upaniṣadic texts which deny the multiplicity of objects and assert the unity of all things, Rāmāṇuja holds that these texts do not mean to deny the reality of the many objects, but only teach that in all of them there is the same Brahman, on which all are dependent for existence. What the Upaniṣads deny is the independence (aprthaksthiti) of objects, but not their dependent existence.<sup>1</sup>

3. *Māyā is God's wonderful Power of Real, not illusory, creation*

It is true that in some scriptural texts God is described as the wielder of a magical power (māyā); but this only means that the inscrutable power by which God creates the world is as wonderful as that of a magician. The word 'māyā' stands for God's power of creating wonderful

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Śrībhāṣya*, 1.1.1.



objects, which passeth our comprehension, and not for any deceptive power of producing illusion. It also stands sometimes for prakṛti to signify her wonderful creative activity.<sup>1</sup> Māyā as illusion-producing Ignorance has no *locus standi*. It cannot be said to exist in the individual self (jīva), because individuality is itself produced by Ignorance and the cause cannot depend on its effect. Nor can it be said to exist in Brahman, because then He ceases to be omniscient.

#### 4. *God is the Absolute Reality possessed of Matter and finite Souls*

According to Rāmānuja, Brahman or God is the Absolute Reality possessed of two integral parts, matter and the finite spirits. Brahman is the only reality in the sense that outside or independent of God there is no other reality. But God contains within Himself the material objects as well as the finite souls which are real. The Absolute one contains the many. Brahman is not a distinctionless unity. He is, of course, free from external distinctions like those that exist between two things of different classes (vijātiyabheda) or two individuals of the same class (sajātiyabheda), since there is nothing besides God, either similar or dissimilar to Him. But God is possessed of internal distinctions (svagata-bheda), as there are within Him conscious and unconscious substances which can be mutually distinguished.

#### 5. *God has all good Qualities*

Brahman is possessed of an infinite number of infinitely good qualities such as omnipotence, omniscience, benevolence.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*



Therefore, God is not characterless (nirguṇa) or indeterminate (nirviśeṣa), but possessed of qualities (saṅguṇa) and determinate (saviśeṣa). When the Upaniṣads deny qualities of Brahman, they really mean that God is free from all bad qualities or imperfections.<sup>1</sup> God really creates the world, sustains it and destroys it. When the world is dissolved, the objects of the world including the bodies of finite souls are destroyed. In this state Brahman remains with pure matter in an undifferentiated form and souls dissociated from their bodies, for both are eternal. This may be called the causal state of Brahman (kāraṇa-brahma). When again objects are created, God becomes manifested as the world of objects and embodied souls. This manifested form of God may be called His effect-state (kārya-brahma). The Upaniṣadic texts which deny the existence of objects and declare Brahman as beyond thought and speech, or as indescribable, really indicate the unmanifested state of Brahman.<sup>2</sup>

#### 6. *God is both Immanent and Transcendent*

With regard to the relation of God to matter and finite spirits, Rāmānuja gives different explanations. Sometimes he says that the relation is like that between parts and whole; matter and spirits are parts of God who is the whole. But this will make God liable to the changes and imperfections to which the parts are subject. So Rāmānuja sometimes holds that God is the soul of which matter and spirits compose the body. Just as the soul controls the body from within but is not affected by bodily changes and imperfections, so God controls the world of matter and spirits from

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Śrībhāṣya, 1.1.1-2, 2.1.15.



within as its Antaryāmin, but is not affected by the changes and imperfections in the world. Sometimes again Rāmānuja tries to prove God's immunity by the analogy of the king and his subjects. The king rules over his subjects but is not affected by the pleasures and pains suffered by them.<sup>1</sup>

In any case, Rāmānuja holds that God is the Supreme Person who is in all things and beings of the world and also remains beyond them; He is both immanent and transcendent. He is the highest object of love and the goal of our religious life. It is by pleasing God through devotion and prayer that we can obtain salvation through His mercy and grace.

#### 7. *The Self is eternal but infinitely small*

According to Rāmānuja, the self of man is limited and finite like his body. The body is made of matter which is a part of God. The soul is, of course, not made; it is eternally existing. But being a part of God, it cannot be infinite. Nor can it be said to have a medium dimension which things composed of parts (such as tables and chairs) have, for then it would be liable to destruction. Therefore, the soul is infinitely small (anu) and not infinite or all-pervasive. But being very subtle (sūkṣma) it can penetrate into every material substance and in this sense is described by the Upaniṣads as all-pervasive.<sup>2</sup>

#### 8. *Consciousness is the essential quality of the Self*

Consciousness is not the essence of the self as held in the Advaita Vedānta. It is an essential and, therefore,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.1.14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.1.1.



eternal quality of the soul and it remains under all conditions. In dreamless sleep and even in the state of liberation, when the soul is altogether disembodied, the soul remains conscious of itself as 'I am'. The self is, therefore, identified by Rāmānuja with what we call the 'I' (aham) or the ego.<sup>1</sup>

9. *Between Self and God there is identity as well as difference*

As for the relation between God and the self of man, Rāmānuja thinks that there is identity of essence and difference in form between them. The soul is finite and imperfect. As such, it cannot be identical with God in every respect. At the same time, man is not different from God in the sense that God pervades and controls man as well as every other thing of the universe. Just as the existence of a part is inseparable from the whole, that of a mode or quality from its substance, so the existence of man is inseparable from God. In this sense there is identity between the soul and God. It is true that identity cannot be asserted between two altogether different terms; but it is also meaningless to assert any identity between exactly identical terms; because it would be a needless tautology. Identity can be asserted between two forms of the same substance. In the Upaniṣadic text 'That thou art' (Tat tvam asi), the identity that is asserted is, therefore, between God with certain qualification (i.e. as man) and God with certain other qualification (i.e. as Brahman); it is the identity of the same substance existing in two different forms.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.1.1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



### 10. *Bondage of the Soul is due to Ignorance*

The soul is not identical with the body, but is really a part of God who controls it from within. But when under the influence of its karma or ignorance, the soul identifies itself with the body and regards it as itself, it becomes subject to the limitations of the body and is in bondage.

### 11. *Liberation of the Soul is attained through Work and Knowledge*

For the attainment of liberation one should perform the obligatory rituals enjoined by the Vedas. This purifies one's heart and removes the obstacles to knowledge. For the correct performance of the Vedic rituals it is necessary to study the Mīmāṃsā philosophy which is, therefore, regarded by Rāmānuja as the indispensable pre-requisite to the study of the Vedānta. By the study of the Mīmāṃsā one comes to realise that sacrificial rites cannot lead to any permanent good and do not help us to attain liberation. So one proceeds to the study of the Vedānta and learns the truth about God, self and the world. He further learns that liberation can be attained not by mere study and reasoning, but by the grace of God. For this, there must be a steady, constant remembrance of God (dhruvā smṛti) which is variously described as meditation (dhyāna), prayer (upāsana), devotion (bhakti). Constant remembrance of God with devotion and self-surrender ultimately matures into an immediate experience (darśana) or realisation of God.<sup>1</sup> He who realises God is liberated from all bondage to the body for ever. But liberation is not the soul's becoming identical with God.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.1.1.



The liberated soul having pure consciousness becomes similar to God (brahmaprakāra). Free from ignorance and bondage of every kind, the liberated soul enjoys infinite joy born of complete communion with God.<sup>1</sup>

#### IV. THE DUALISM OF MADHVA (DVAITA)

Madhvācārya gives another interpretation of the Vedānta sūtras and the Upaniṣads which is different from those of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja. He holds that there are two kinds of ultimate realities, the independent (svatantra) and the dependent (asvatantra). God is the absolutely independent reality, all other realities like soul and matter are dependent on God. The relation between them is one of absolute difference, neither absolute identity nor both identity and difference. Reality is a system of fivefold distinction for which it is called prapañca. Madhva insists on the five great differences or distinctions between God and individual souls, God and material objects, one individual soul and another, souls and material objects, and one material object and another. Therefore, the system of Vedānta developed by him is known as Dvaita or Dualism.

##### 1. *The World is a Real Creation different from and Dependent on God*

The world of material objects is created by God out of matter which is called prakṛti. Prakṛti is not, like māyā, a magical power of producing illusion. It is an unconscious and eternal reality like that of the Sāṅkhya. But unlike the Sāṅkhya prakṛti, it is subordinate to and dependent on God.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.4.



It is not a part of God, but very different from God. Prakṛti is the material cause of world and it evolves the world of material objects including bodies under the intelligent and wise guidance of God. The process of evolution of the gross world from prakṛti is, as in the Sāṅkhya, through the twenty-four principles of mahat, buddhi, ahaṅkāra, etc. Avidyā or ignorance which obscures our knowledge or conceals God from our view is a form of prakṛti. Madhva is against all attempts to reduce the world to an illusory product of God's māyā or of our ignorance. He maintains an absolute dualism between God and the world which is as real as God though dependent on Him.

## 2. *God is the absolute Creator of the universe and the Redeemer of good Souls*

God is the only independent reality, who creates, sustains and destroys the world by his will. All things of the world and all souls are absolutely dependent on God. He is the efficient cause of the world, not its material cause. He controls and guides prakṛti, the material cause, and through her builds up this wonderful world. He possesses all good and glorious qualities like omnipotence, omniscience, benevolence in unlimited extent. He is unsurpassed in excellence and is the Supreme Person without an equal. This is what is meant by the Upaniṣadic text. 'Brahman is one only without a second' (ekamevādvitīyam). He is called Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu, Hari, etc. He is pure existence-consciousness-bliss (sat-cit-ānanda) incarnate and lives in His heavenly abode with His consort, Lakṣmī, who is the personification of His creative power and dependent on Him.



God manifests Himself in many forms and in many incarnations of the world.<sup>1</sup>

God is the absolute ruler of all things and beings. He is the inner ruler (antaryāmin) of all souls.<sup>2</sup> He guides us from life to life in bondage and also helps us to attain final liberation, according to our bad and good deeds. Although He is guided in his activities by the consideration of our karmas, He is not bound or limited by it. He gives us the light of knowledge and also obscures our spiritual and mental powers at times. He condemns some souls and redeems others, according as they are vicious and virtuous. He is the Lord of even the gods and rules over the universe with unrestricted power and infinite wisdom. He is immanent in the world as the inner ruler of all souls, and transcendent to it as infinite spirit and inexhaustible creative power.

### 3. *Individual Souls are eternal conscious Substances different from God*

An individual soul is a conscious substance which knows itself as 'I am'. It is not created by God, but exists eternally as a conscious and active subject who enjoys and suffers, is subject to bondage and can be liberated. It is infinitely small (aṇu) and has limited power and knowledge.<sup>3</sup> There are many souls. Souls are different from God and from one another, although they are all absolutely dependent on God. They are neither parts of God, nor do they form the body of God. It is sheer ignorance to think that the

<sup>1</sup> *Sūtrabhāṣya*, 4.2.9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.2.13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.3.23.



soul is identical with God, for the finite can never become identical with the infinite. Even in liberation the distinction between soul and God, or between one soul and another is maintained. For, the liberated soul's knowledge and bliss are limited as compared with those of God which are unlimited. Then, the knowledge and bliss enjoyed by liberated souls are in each case appropriate to their respective merits, so that some distinction among them still remains in the state of liberation. The Upaniṣadic text: 'That art thou' (Tat tvam asi) does not mean that the individual self is identical with God, but only that it is *similar* to God in respect of its essential qualities like knowledge and bliss. Just as a servant is never identical with his master, so the finite self can never become identical with God—the infinite, absolute self.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. *Bondage of the Soul is due to Ignorance*

The soul in its real nature is a finite, conscious and blissful being which is quite distinct from the material body and is completely dependent on God. But when in its ignorance it forgets the truth and identifies itself with the body, it comes under bondage to the body and suffers from all the ills to which all flesh is subject. It undergoes birth and death in this or some other world till it is liberated.

#### 5. *Liberation comes through Knowledge and God's grace*

As ignorance about God and the self is the root-cause of bondage, the first step in the attainment of liberation is

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.8.29, 41-42.



the acquisition of true knowledge about them. A man should study the scriptures to know the truth about God, self and the world. From these he comes to know that God is the absolute, independent reality, the omnipotent and omniscient creator of the world, and the inner ruler of all things and beings. He further knows that like all other things he is completely dependent on God, not identical with Him, and that it is his duty to remember constantly the fact of his absolute dependence on God.

But mere knowledge about God and the self cannot lead to liberation without the grace of God. In order that a man may receive God's grace, he should be sincerely devoted to God and spend his life in study of the scriptures and loving service to God and the cause of truth and goodness. All this pleases God who is Himself truth and goodness. God gives His grace to such a man who loves and serves God as his dearest. With this the man is liberated from all bondage. At death he leaves this body and this world to enjoy for ever the infinite bliss of intimate communion with God.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.2.20-21, 23-27.



## CHAPTER IX

## THE SYNTHESIS OF THE SYSTEMS

So far we have made a survey of the main classical systems of Indian philosophy. Now we shall make an attempt to work out a synthesis of them. By a synthesis of these different systems is here meant a combination and, virtually, a reconciliation of them as forming compatible parts or progressive stages of one comprehensive system of philosophy.

1. *The Differences of the Systems make their synthesis difficult*

On the face of it, a synthesis of the different systems of Indian philosophy is a difficult task. The classical systems appear to be not only different but sometimes conflicting in their general character and structure. It is true that all the systems of Indian philosophy, excepting the Cārvāka, have the unity of a moral and spiritual outlook. Still, they seem to differ widely from one another in their basic concepts and fundamental doctrines. These relate to the nature of Reality—God, self and the world—and the highest good of man's life. The Cārvāka or materialistic views on these points are pronouncedly different from and opposed to those of the other schools. Let us first consider these differences among the classical systems.

In the Cārvāka system the material world is the only reality, the self is the body with the quality of consciousness, there is no God, no heaven and hell, no future life and



immortality, and enjoyment of the pleasures of life is the highest good for man.

In the Bauddha philosophy, reality is a continuous flow of momentary phases of existences, everything is impermanent, the self is an unbroken stream of successive states, governed by the law of karma and rebirth without the guidance of God, and nirvāṇa as the extinction of passions and misery and the attainment of peace and bliss is the highest good.

For the Jainas, reality is many-faced, change and permanence are both real; truth is manifold; there are many souls; the soul is an essentially conscious substance, and is different from the body and the mind, it has the potentiality of perfect knowledge, power and joy; but in its worldly life the soul is in bondage to the body due to its karma; liberation is to be attained through right faith, right knowledge and right conduct; there is no God, but the liberated saints with God-like qualities should be followed and worshipped by us.

In the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophy reality is a system of many selves and other entities. The self is a pure substance, which is infinite and eternal, and consciousness is an accidental quality of it; God is the Supreme self and the omnipotent and omniscient creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world, and also its moral governor; God creates the world out of eternal entities which exist independently of Him. The self is different from the body and mind. Bondage of the self is due to ignorance about reality; liberation is to be attained through knowledge of reality. Some Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas hold that liberation is a negative state of only cessation of suffering; others, however, maintain that it is a positive experience of joy.



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In the Sāṅkhya-Yoga system reality is a dualism of two different, ultimate principles—spirit and matter (*puruṣa* and *prakṛti*). Spirit or self is pure consciousness devoid of all change and activity; *prakṛti* is unconscious, ever-changing and always active. Both *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* are eternal and infinite, but while there are many *puruṣas* or selves, there is only one *prakṛti* constituted by three substantive powers called *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Prakṛti* is the material cause which evolves the whole world of objects when it is associated with *puruṣa*. God is not necessary to explain the world. Here the Yoga differs from the Sāṅkhya and holds that the association of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* is brought about by God Who is the highest self distinguished from all other selves by His unique attributes. *Puruṣa* and *prakṛti* being entirely different principles, it is sheer ignorance to think that the self is the body, senses, mind, intellect or ego. Bondage of the self is due to such ignorance; liberation from bondage comes through realisation of the utter distinction of the self from all material objects including the mind, intellect and ego (*viveka-jñāna*). The Yoga sets forth the practical method for this realisation. It is in *asaṃprajñāta samādhi* that there is a clear realisation of the self as pure, self-shining consciousness, free from all relation to the world of objects.

The Mīmāṃsā believes in the reality of the world with all its diverse objects. It also believes in many souls, heaven, hell and deities to whom sacrifice is to be performed, according to the injunctions of the Vedas whose authority it values more than that of ordinary empirical knowledge. Souls are eternal and infinite spiritual substances. Consciousness is not the essence of the soul, but an accidental quality which arises when some conditions are present. But the soul has



always the potentiality of consciousness in it. There are no gods or God. The deities to whom sacrifice is to be performed are not persons or living beings of any kind. They are just the mantras to be found in the Vedas. These mantras are uncreated, eternal words which constitute the Vedas and were revealed to the Vedic seers (ṛṣis). The disinterested performance of Vedic rites and knowledge of the self help man to exhaust the effects of his past karmas and become free from bondage to the world. Liberation is the total destruction of such bondage. Since in liberation the soul has no consciousness, it neither suffers pain nor enjoys bliss. It is a state where the soul remains in its own intrinsic nature as pure substance or existence. Some later Mīmāṃsakas, however, hold that liberation is an experience of joy.

While the three main schools of the Vedānta, we have explained here, agree in holding that Brahman is the ultimate, independent cause of the world, they seem to differ widely from one another on some important points. For Saṅkara, Brahman is, from the transcendental standpoint, a distinctionless, qualityless, indeterminate reality (nirguṇa and nirviśeṣa), although from the practical and worldly standpoint Brahman is qualified by certain attributes. He holds also that the world is an illusory creation of Brahman through His magical power of māyā, and that the individual soul (jīva) is absolutely identical with Brahman. But for both Rāmānuja and Madhva, Brahman is a determinate and qualified reality (saguṇa and saviśeṣa), a Personal Being possessed of an infinite number of infinitely good qualities. Again, for both, the world is a real creation of Brahman and māyā is a real, though wonderful, power of God. But while Rāmānuja holds that matter and souls form the body of God,



Madhva thinks that they are different from God, though dependent on Him. For Rāmānuja, Brahman is both the efficient and material cause of the world, but for Madhva He is only the efficient cause of it. Again, Rāmānuja thinks that the individual soul is different from as well as identical with Brahman. But Madhva holds that the two are absolutely different and they always remain different; even in the state of liberation the soul remains different from Brahman, although it resembles Him in certain respects.

## 2. *A Synthesis of the systems is possible on Four Basic Principles*

Despite their differences in certain important matters, a synthesis of the Indian systems of philosophy is possible on the basis of four basic principles. These may be briefly stated and explained as follows.

### (i) The First Principle :

All knowledge of reality comes from experience and, conversely, all experience reveals reality in some aspect or form of it. Here experience means any way to directly cognising anything, and reality means that which is given in or presented to some genuine experience. If we are to know the existence of anything, we must have some experience of it; otherwise it will remain unknown to us. A man born blind does not know what light or colour is, nor can he know it by any process of reasoning. On the other hand, if we have the experience of anything, we know some existence in some way, however partial and imperfect the knowledge may be. Different men may see a mountain from different places



and distances, and have different views of it. But these different views represent different sides, aspects or perspectives of the same mountain. Even when we see an illusory object, we apprehend a part of real space in which the illusory object exists and which it apparently qualifies.

(ii) The Second Principle :

There are different levels of human experience. Broadly speaking, there are four levels of experience, namely, waking, dream, dreamless sleep and spiritual intuition or simply spiritual experience. In some of these levels we may distinguish between different grades or forms of experience. Thus waking experience may take the form of ordinary and normal sense experience, or of abnormal and illusory experience, or of imagination, thought, attention, reason and intellectual intuition. So also dream may be of the form of memory or reproductive imagination and constructive or creative imagination. Deep, dreamless sleep seems to have no grades and forms. It seems to be a formless and homogeneous consciousness of peace and joy without reference to any subject and object. Of spiritual experience, which is variously described as religious, mystical, or supersensuous experience, we may also speak of different grades like meditation (*dhyāna*), conscious concentration (*savikalpa samādhi*) and super-conscious absorption (*nirvikalpa samādhi* or *turiya*). In meditation the distinction between the subject and the object of thought is maintained, and the act and object of thought remain distinct and separate states of consciousness. In *savikalpa samādhi*, the act of thought seems to be lost in the object of thought, though there still remains an indistinct consciousness of both the subject and the



object. In nirvikalpa samādhi, however, all thought processes cease, all mental modifications are stopped, and *nothing is known* or thought of by the mind. Still, it is not a state of unconsciousness, but of genuine super-physical experience in which all mental functions completely cease and the self shines in itself as pure subject-objectless consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

### (iii) The Third Principle :

The revelations of reality we have from different levels of experience will be somewhat different and sometimes conflicting and apparently contradictory. The water of the ocean seen from a distance seems to be blue, but when we drip a handful of it through the air, it is seen as colourless. The face of the earth wears very different looks when observed from different altitudes. The sun appears as a small disc of light from the level of man's sense experience, but from the level of his scientific thought it is an immeasurable orb of fire.

### (iv) The Fourth Principle :

A comprehensive system of philosophy must be based on experience at all its levels, and not merely on this or that particular level to the exclusion of the others. Every genuine experience of reality from any of the levels mentioned here or from any other authentic level, would be a revelation of reality in some form or aspect of it. Hence the different types of experience would give us the different

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Yoga-sūtra* and *Bhāṣya*, 1-3.



aspects and characters of reality. If we exclude or ignore any one of them, we shall miss those aspects and characters of reality which are revealed by it, and our philosophy would be a partial and one-sided view of reality. We have such partial knowledge about an orange when relying only on this or that kind of sense experience of it, we say that the orange has a yellow-red colour but no taste and smell, or that it has a sweet, acid taste but no colour and smell. To say that the orange has a certain colour or taste is no doubt true. But it does not give us the whole truth about the orange. If we are to know the whole truth about it we must combine and synthesise all our experiences of it in one comprehensive judgment which ignores none of them but gives them their due places in one full view of the object. In similar way, the different systems of philosophy—Indian or Western—as based on particular levels of experience give us but partial views of reality. They are true so far as they go and give us certain aspects and characters of reality. But none of them can be said to exhaust all the characters of reality or to give us the whole truth about it. For this we should have a synthetic philosophy which is based on all possible levels of experience. Such a philosophy is in a position to combine and correlate the different systems of philosophy as parts or stages of one comprehensive philosophy of life and the world.

### 3. *The Systems of Philosophy may be Reoriented in the Light of these Principles*

In the light of these basic principles we may now try to understand sympathetically the different systems of



philosophy and see what aspect or aspects of reality they represent and what places they occupy in a comprehensive philosophy. This will help us to synthesise and appreciate them as compatible and complementary parts of one system of philosophy.

#### 4. *The Cārvāka View of the material world is Partially True*

Indian philosophy is spiritualistic (adhyātma śāstra) in the sense that it believes in spirit as the ultimate reality and helps man to realise his self. The Cārvāka philosophy arises from the level of sense experience. For both the individual and the race, sense experience is primary and most important for practical life. Hence the testimony of sense experience is accepted first and valued most by almost all men. Now for sense experience there is a revelation of reality as a material world of objects possessing sensible qualities such as sound, touch, colour, taste and smell. In the Upaniṣads we are told that God made the senses outward-directed to see external objects, and not the self within.<sup>1</sup> This means that, by their nature and constitution, the senses perceive things as possessing sensible qualities and, therefore, as material. So we may say that the material world is a revelation of reality relatively to our senses as they are constituted by nature or God, and that matter is one of the many forms or manifestations of reality itself. In the Upaniṣads also *anna*, i.e. matter is said to be a form of Brahman.<sup>2</sup> The materia-

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 2.1.1.

<sup>2</sup> Vide *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 3.2.



listic view of the world gives us one aspect of reality and is, therefore, partially true, although materialism as a system of philosophy makes this aspect exhaustive of reality and so eventually turns out false.

Materialism is the first step in man's spiritual life. Although materialism as a philosophy is not acceptable, yet it may be said with some justification that the materialistic mode of thought and life is the stepping-stone to our higher spiritual life. The materialistic conception of the soul as the conscious living body is just the primary idea that men can form in their individual and racial life. It is also the idea with which the uneducated and unregenerate mind ought to be initiated into the mystery of the soul. The Upaniṣadic teachers, we know, used to impart the idea of the self as the body as the first lesson in the science of soul.<sup>1</sup> The real self is described in the Upaniṣads as having an *annamaya koṣa*, i.e. the body as its outermost sheath.<sup>2</sup> The Cārvāka conception of soul represents the *annamaya koṣa* of the self. This *koṣa* or sheath is a tangible and more easily accessible counterpart of the soul. It is a visible manifestation of the soul, or the soul itself as manifested in a body. Hence the materialist conception of the soul at least serves to give us a foothold to reach the higher conception of it. The path of worldly activity and enjoyment (*pravṛtti*), followed by the Cārvāka, naturally leads one to the spiritual path of renunciation (*nivṛtti*). It is only when a man's worldly hankerings are fully satisfied and still his heart feels dissatisfied, that he begins his quest of the higher spiritual values of life.

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 8.7.4.

<sup>2</sup> Vide *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, 2.2.5.



### 5. *The Bauddha Philosophy of Change Emphasises the Living Character of Reality*

The Bauddha philosophy is an approach to reality from the level of vital consciousness or the experience of life process. Life is an incessant process of change and growth. It never stops, but ever flows. For life, to come to a standstill means death. If, therefore, we approach reality from the level of our experience of life process we would get a revelation of it as a living and changing system and as essentially impermanent. That everything of the world of our ordinary experience and the world as a whole are changing and impermanent we cannot deny. So also with regard to the empirical self of man it is true to say with the Buddhist that it is a continuous succession of changing states and processes. Hence change and impermanence somehow belong to reality as its empirical character. So far the Bauddha view of reality is correct and it is admitted by the Upaniṣads and other systems of Indian philosophy.

The Bauddha view of reality and the self seems to have been anticipated by the Upaniṣads. In them we find that Brahman, the Ultimate reality, is described as Prāṇa or life. So also the Ātman is said to have a manomaya and vijñānamaya koṣa.<sup>1</sup> This means that mental and intellectual states and processes form the empirical characters of the self.

But neither the philosophy of the Bauddhas nor that of the Upaniṣads stops with the empirical world and the empirical self. The prāṇa is an empirical character of Brahman. The manomaya and vijñānamaya koṣas are only the outer covers of the Ātman. They are manifestations of

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, 3.3; *Vedāntasāra* (Cal.), pp. 91-99.



it and are grounded in it. So also Buddha tells us : " There is an unborn, an unoriginated, an unmade, an uncompound- ed; were there not, O mendicants, there would be no escape from the world of the born, the originated, the made and the compounded."<sup>1</sup> This means that underlying the empirical world of changing phenomena there is a permanent, eternal reality. This is the Ātman or Brahman of the Upaniṣads and the Advaita Vedānta. Buddha also taught the possibi- lity of man's attaining in nirvāṇa an experience or consciousness which is not produced by the activity of the senses.<sup>2</sup> This he regarded as the supreme reality, as well. If so, the supreme reality, according to Buddha and the Vedānta, we may say, is the same. But Bauddha philo- sophy makes a special contribution to the comprehension of reality by emphasising the living and changing character of reality.

6. *The Jaina Philosophy Emphasises Equally the Changing and Permanent Characters of Reality and Discovers the Soul in All Living Bodies*

The Jaina philosophy is based on ordinary sense experience, reason and the spiritual intuition of the Tīrthaṅ- karas. It believes in many reals, non-extended and extended, living and non-living. While the Bauddhas emphasise the character of change and impermanence in reality, the Jainas attach equal importance to the characters of change and permanence in it. In this respect the Jaina philosophy may be said to be complementary to the

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Udāna*, 8.3.

<sup>2</sup> Vide *Brahmajāla-sutta*.



Bauddha. Again, while the Bauddhas regard everything as a living process, the Jainas bring to light the permanent soul in all living bodies. Here the Jaina philosophy seems to be an advance on the Bauddha in the direction of a comprehensive philosophy.

The soul is an eternal substance of which consciousness is an essential quality. It is the soul that knows things, performs activities, enjoys pleasures, suffers pains, and illumines itself and other objects. It is permanent as a substance, but also undergoes change of states. It has the potentiality of infinite knowledge, power and joy which it realises when liberated.

The Jaina philosophy contributes to a better comprehension of reality by showing that both change and permanence are true of reality and constitute different characters of the same reality. It may also be noted that the Jaina conception of the liberated soul as possessed of infinite knowledge, power and joy, reveals certain characters of the self which have also been recognised in the Vedānta.

#### *7. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Philosophy Establishes the Reality of God and the World and of the Self as Pure Existence*

In the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system we have an approach to reality from the level of logical thought and reason. Although it is primarily interested in the problems of knowledge and the world, it has made no small contribution to the problems of God and the Self, and may be regarded as a spiritualistic philosophy as well. It has a special value for our spiritual life in so far as it supplies the rational basis for our belief in God and the Self as transcendent realities, and



defends it against the sceptic's attacks and criticisms. This is perhaps the reason why an ancient Indian philosopher described the Nyāya as a thorny fence (kaṇṭhakāvaraṇa) to protect the Vedānta. It also helps us to remove all doubts about the truths taught by the Scriptures and to have firm conviction in them. It may thus be said to pertain to the stage of manana or reflection in the threefold method of study of the Vedānta. The study of the Nyāya is, therefore, considered essential for the study of the Vedānta.

From the rationalistic standpoint, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophy reveals certain characters of reality, *i.e.* God, self and the world. The world is a system of many independent objects, atoms, minds, souls, etc. The self is a substance which is different from the mind and the body. It is infinite and eternal. It has no qualities in itself, although in its embodied condition it acquires certain psychical qualities. In the state of liberation, again, the self ceases to have any qualities and even consciousness. This means that the self is pure substance or pure existence without distinctions and qualities, pleasures and pains. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system thus brings out the character of the self as pure existence (sat) and brings it under the category of substance. This is recognised as one of the constitutive characters of the self in the Vedānta. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika also reconciles pluralistic realism with the moral and spiritual outlook of life and the theistic faith in God as the creator and moral governor of the world. In it, as in some schools of Vedānta, the world is said to form the body of God. Again, some Naiyāyikas at least hold that liberation is a state of positive bliss. So we may say that on fundamental points there is no contradiction between the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and the Vedānta. We may also say that the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika view of the world is just



a possible revelation of reality from the level of thought and reason which analyse things into their parts and explain them as wholes made up of parts. As such, it has a value of its own and may serve as a guide to life for those who are of a predominantly intellectual and critical temperament.

8. *The Sāṅkhya-Yoga Emphasises the Self's Distinction from the Not-Self and its Character of Pure Consciousness*

The Sāṅkhya-Yoga system arises from a level of experience at which attention as pure thinking alternately moves in a negative and a positive direction, a process of inwardisation and a process of externalisation. By the one, it reveals reality as pure consciousness which is independent of all objects, and is unbounded by space, time and causality. As such, it is the pure subject, the infinite, eternal and free spirit transcending the body, the senses, the mind, the intellect and the ego. This is the puruṣa or self in Sāṅkhya philosophy. By the other process, attention reveals reality as the indefinitely pure existence which underlies all definite existence and of which they are the manifestations. It is the infinite and eternal, independent and unmanifested ground of the manifest, material world. This is the prakṛti or pradhāna of the Sāṅkhya philosophy. While the existence of prakṛti is independent of the existence of puruṣa, the nature of prakṛti is to be manifest to the self. But the self is by its nature free from reference to prakṛti. Its relation to prakṛti, or its supposed association with the body is the cause of its bondage to the world. Liberation from bondage is to be attained through discrimination of the self from the whole world of nature or prakṛti. Prakṛti ceases to function and even to exist for the liberated



self. The liberated self exists in its intrinsic nature as self-manifesting pure consciousness.

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system, we have seen, brings out the character of the self as pure existence (sat). The Sāṅkhya-Yoga reveals another character of it as pure consciousness (cit). Like some Naiyāyikas, some commentators and interpreters of the Sāṅkhya-Yoga admit that in liberation there is the experience of positive bliss.<sup>1</sup> Since in liberation there is no other cause or condition to produce bliss we are to admit that bliss belongs to the very nature of the self. This is just what we find affirmed in the Vedānta. In view of all this we may say that the Vedānta conception of Ātman as existence-consciousness-bliss (sat-cit-ānanda) does not contradict but rather combines and completes the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Sāṅkhya-Yoga conceptions of it. So also the Sāṅkhya conception of prakṛti has been given a theistic turn in the Vedānta and prakṛti becomes the creative power of Brahman, called māyā.

The Sāṅkhya emphasises the character of pure consciousness in the self and its utter distinction from prakṛti or primal matter. The self is the subject as pure consciousness and prakṛti is the object as pure existence. The Sāṅkhya admits a metaphysical dualism between the subject and the object, the existence of each being conceived as independent of the existence of the other. Hence the view of reality that we get here is a dualism of subject and object. Reality is revealed as the subject on the one side and the object on the other, and the two sides seem to be quite distinct and different. Such a revelation of reality is naturally given by

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Pātañjala-sūtra*, 3.18 and *Vyāsa-bhāṣya* thereon.



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our attentive consciousness, which is alternately directed inward upon the self and outward upon its object. Even for our meditative consciousness the distinction between subject and object is maintained and we have a revelation of reality as distinguished and divided into two entities. But when one rises to the level of deep concentration, all thought of the object ceases and the subject alone remains. This is what takes place in nirvikalpa samādhi. In this state the whole world of objects disappears and the self remains in itself, as pure objectless consciousness. The attainment of this state is the aim of yoga. Hence for one established in yoga, reality is revealed as the pure subject—the Ātman—which is identical with the Advaita Vedāntin's nirguṇa Brahman.

9. *The Mīmāṃsā Denies God and Personal Deities and Believes in Mantras as Eternal Audible Characters of Reality Revealed by the Vedas*

The Mīmāṃsā philosophy of ritualism arises from a level of experience which combines sense-perception, reason and the testimony of Śruti or the Vedas. It believes in the reality of the world with all its diverse objects and also in souls, heaven, hell and deities to whom sacrifice is to be performed, according to the Vedic commandments. It does not believe in God as creator of the world, but holds that the law of karma is sufficient to guide the formation of all objects of the world. The different Vedic deities, of course, form necessary parts of the sacrifices performed. But these deities are not personal beings with any moral and spiritual characters. They are only certain names or words revealed by the Vedas called mantras. As revealed by the eternal,



self-revealing Vedas, the mantras also are eternal and self-revealing.

Now mantras are the natural names of objects. The natural sounds of objects are their natural names. Such natural names are called *vīja*-(root) mantras. A thing is a centre of stresses or forces. Wherever there are stresses or forces, there are sounds. So everything of the world, a dew drop or an atom, has a natural sound of its own, because it is a grouping of forces. These natural sounds are eternal, because their constitutive forces are eternal. Being very subtle and supersonic they are not heard by us with our gross ears. It requires the subtle ear of a Yogin or the perfect ear of a Brahman to hear these subtle sounds which constitute the mantras. The Veda is the body of such eternal, natural sounds or words which are called mantras. Hence the Mīmāṃsaka's conception of deities as mantras may be said to bring to light the eternal sounds which are the acoustic equivalents of the forces or energies which are constitutive of the objects of the world. This is admitted by the Upaniṣads when they declare that the mantra 'om' is the sound of the first creative stress in Brahman and that *om* is the prius and potency of all other mantras or sounds and so of the whole world of objects.<sup>1</sup> We may, therefore, say that the Mīmāṃsaka explains the eternal, audible characters of reality, though they are inaudible and supersonic for ordinary human beings. Just as reality has material, vital and mental characters, so it has certain audible characters. It is the audible characters of reality, its eternal audible forms (*vāṇmayarūpa*) that the Mīmāṃsaka emphasises in his philosophy of ritualism.

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* and Gauḍapāda's *Kārikā* thereon.



10. *The Dvaita, Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita Schools of Vedānta approach Reality from different levels of experience and reveal different characters of it*

For all schools of the Vedānta, Brahman is the absolute, independent Reality. But the conceptions of Brahman and its relation to the self and the world are different in the Dvaita, the Viśiṣṭādvaita and the Advaita school.

For Dvaita Vedānta, Brahman is the Supreme Person who is the omnipotent and omniscient efficient cause of the world. He is absolutely independent of, and different from, everything. Material objects and individual selves are as real as Brahman Himself, and are different from one another as well as from Brahman, though they are all dependent on Brahman.

This view of Reality as an independent Self related to other real selves and material objects which are different from, but dependent on it, is the outcome of a rational interpretation of sense experience and spiritual intuition. Our ordinary sense experience and reason convince us of the reality as well as of the dependent character of the many finite selves and material objects of the world. At the same time, there are in us a supersensuous or intuitive experience of a higher power than ourselves and a feeling of our dependence on it, however indistinct and indefinite these may be. This higher power is recognised in the Dvaita Vedānta as the absolutely independent God on whom all other reals are absolutely dependent, though they are mutually different from one another.

In Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta Brahman as the absolute reality is a Personal Being possessed of all good qualities and inseparably related to the world of selves and matter, as



substance to quality or as a whole to its parts. This conception of reality is based on the level of determinate self-consciousness, or the level of meditation (dhyāna) maturing into conscious concentration (savikalpa samādhi). In determinate self-consciousness there is an immediate experience of the self and its consciousness as different but at the same time inseparable. Now to understand the relation between two facts which are different and yet inseparably related, we apply the category of substance and quality, or 'whole and part'. For example, a rose is different from its colour, and yet inseparably related to it; therefore, we say that the rose is a substance or thing of which the colour is a quality. Thus in the light of our determinate experience of the self, there is a revelation of reality as the Supreme Self related to and qualified by the world of objects, *i.e.* as *Saguṇa Brahman*. In the state of dhyāna or meditation, the act and the object of thought remain distinct and separate states of consciousness. So for meditative consciousness, Brahman and the world of souls and matter would be different. But in savikalpa samādhi, the act of meditation is not separately cognised; it takes on the form of the object, and loses itself, as it were, leaving the object alone to shine in the mind. So from the level of savikalpa samādhi, Brahman is the only absolute reality, finite selves and material objects have no separate and independent existence of their own, they have being only in Brahman as parts of His being. As the object of meditation Brahman is a Personal Being, and as containing parts He would be qualified and determinate (*saguṇa* and *saviśeṣa*).

For the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara, Brahman is, from the transcendental standpoint, the Impersonal Absolute, a perfectly indeterminate, distinctionless and qualityless



reality (nirguṇa). From this standpoint Brahman may be described only as pure existence-consciousness-bliss, although we cannot thereby directly convey the true idea of Brahman. Of course, from the ordinary empirical or worldly point of view, Brahman is the omnipotent and omniscient creator, possessed of many great and good qualities.

This view of Reality as perfectly indeterminate or as pure existence-consciousness-bliss, arises from the level of superconscious concentration (nirvikalpa samādhi) in which there is an immediate experience of the self and its consciousness, not as different and inseparable, but as non-different and identical. It is an experience of self as consciousness and of consciousness as self; it is not even an experience of self, consciousness and their non-difference, but one undifferentiated, blissful experience which is ineffable. From this level of superconscious experience we have a revelation of reality as pure existence-consciousness-bliss, or as even not that, but as the perfectly indeterminate and characterless (nirviśeṣa and nirguṇa).

#### 11. *Different Characters may belong to the Same Reality*

So far we have seen how the different classical systems of Indian philosophy approach Reality from different levels of experience and attribute different characters to it and one of them at least declares it characterless and indeterminate (nirguṇa and nirviśeṣa). Now we are to observe that these characters belong to the same Reality and represent different aspects of it. One kind of experience from one level is as good a revelation of Reality as another from a different level, since they are all genuine human experiences. If sense experience be, and generally it is, recognised as genuine



experience, there is no reason why spiritual experience in the states of meditation and concentration (dhyāna and samādhi) should not be so recognised. There is really no difference between them excepting that the former is natural and common for all persons, while the latter is rare and attainable only through training and culture. But that is no reason why we should discredit it and reject its deliverances. The artist's capacity for fine aesthetic discernment is a rare thing and a laborious acquisition indeed. But for that we do not doubt the validity of his judgments on aesthetic matters, rather we value them more than those of the layman. So we should recognise the value of all types of genuine experience from different levels and admit that they reveal different aspects and characters of Reality. In the light of this we are to say that the material world in space and time, life process, minds and souls are different forms and manifestations of Reality, that both change and permanence are real characters of Reality, and that Reality in one aspect of it is possessed of many qualities (saṁguṇa), and in another aspect is devoid of all qualities (nirguṇa). As such, Reality is many-sided and Truth is manifold; and each system of philosophy approaches Reality from one level of experience and embodies one aspect of Truth.

12. *Diverse and even opposed Characters may belong to the Same Thing*

It may be asked here : How can the same Reality have such diverse and apparently opposed characters? To this we are to reply that everything of the world is found to possess diverse and almost innumerable characters. An object like a man, for example, possesses such diverse positive characters

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as his size, shape, colour, weight, nationality, age, heredity, etc., and the numberless relations he bears to all other objects of the world. The negative characters of a man consist of what he is not, *i.e.* of his differences from all other objects of the world, which are too many to be counted. From the sun to a blade of grass none of us dare claim to have exhausted all the possible characters of a thing. Even opposed characters may belong to the same thing. The same water is found to have certain touch, taste and small qualities which are not only different, but of which one is the negation of the other. That the same entity may be qualified and qualityless, determinate and indeterminate is at least suggested by some analogous instances. The sky seen by us near the horizon is blue or red, but in the open intervening region it is colourless. The water of the vast ocean seems to be boundless and formless, but when congealed by extreme cold it assumes definite shapes and forms.

### 13. *Different systems of Philosophy represent Different aspects of Reality*

In view of what we have said before we may admit that the different characters ascribed to Reality by different systems of philosophy are all true of it, and that Reality in one aspect of it is characterless and indeterminate. Each system represents one aspect of Reality and is so far true, though none of them gives the whole truth about it. If the materialist is wrong when he takes matter as the only reality, the idealist or spiritualist would be no less wrong when he takes mind or self, Ātman or Brahman as the sole reality and denies all reality to matter or relegates everything else to the region of the false and the illusory in the ordinary



sense. Rather we are to say that matter, life, mind, self and even mantras are different manifestations of Reality and that the Cārvāka, Bauddha and Jaina, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya-Yoga and Mīmāṃsā each gives us some truth about Reality, but none the whole of it. Similarly, we may say that Reality in one aspect of it is a self-conscious Person, different from and related to a world of material objects and conscious souls, as maintained by the Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita schools of Vedānta; and that in another aspect it is the indeterminate, Impersonal Absolute as held by the Advaita Vedānta of the Śaṅkara school. This is really admitted by Śaṅkara both in his philosophy and life. In his philosophy the same Brahman is recognised as saguṇa and nirguṇa from different standpoints. In his life he was no less a devoted worshipper of Saguṇa Brahman than a staunch advocate of the Nirguṇa.

#### 14. *The Synthesis suggested is supported by the Vedas and Upaniṣads*

The line of synthesis and reconciliation of the different Indian systems of philosophy, we have suggested here, has the support of the Vedas and Upaniṣads. In the R̥g-veda the Supreme Reality is described as one great person (Puruṣa) who is both immanent in the world and transcendent to it. We are further told that the reality underlying all existence cannot be described either as non-existent or as existent, that it is indeterminate and indescribable. Thus the same Reality is conceived as having two aspects—the personal and the impersonal, the determinate and the indeterminate. Brahman as the Ultimate Reality is, there-



fore, both the Personal God (saṁguṇa) and the impersonal Absolute (nirguṇa).<sup>1</sup> In the Upaniṣads it is clearly stated that 'Brahman has two aspects—one with form, the other without form; one mortal, the other immortal; one static, the other dynamic; one existent, the other beyond the existent.'<sup>2</sup>

In the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*<sup>3</sup> we find that Brahman is first described as real, conscious and infinite, and then we are told to know anna or matter as Brahman, prāṇa or life as Brahman, manas or mind as Brahman, vijñāna or consciousness as Brahman, and ānanda or bliss as Brahman. Further, Ātman or the real self is also described as having five koṣas or sheaths made of the body, the vital breath, the mind, cognition and bliss. These sheaths are not the self, but they are grounded in the self and are its external forms and manifestations. Again, in some Upaniṣads it is clearly stated that 'all this is Brahman'.<sup>4</sup> It follows from all these Upaniṣadic texts that the universe with all its diverse objects is a visible manifestation of Brahman. They are in Brahman and are so many forms of Brahman. This appears also from what the Upaniṣads say about the starting-point of creation. They declare: At first there was the soul. It thought, 'I am one, I will be many', 'I will create the world'.<sup>5</sup> This shows clearly that it is the one soul that has become the many mundane objects.

<sup>1</sup> *R̥g-veda*, 10.90, 129. Cf. *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakrishṇa-Kathāmr̥ta*, Vol. II, 8th ed., p. 23, where Śrī Ramakrishṇa says: 'In the Veda He is said to be both formless and with form, qualityless and with qualities'.

<sup>2</sup> Vide *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 2.3.1.

<sup>3</sup> *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 2. 1-5.

<sup>4</sup> Vide *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 2.2.11; *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 3.14.1.

<sup>5</sup> Vide *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 2.6.



15. *Different kinds of Upaniṣadic Texts may be accepted as equally Valid*

It is true that there are different kinds of texts in the Upaniṣads, some which clearly describe Brahman as qualityless and indeterminate (nirguṇa and nirviśeṣa) and some which as clearly describe Him as qualified and determinate (saguṇa and saviśeṣa), some which deny multiplicity and some which affirm it, some which emphasise the identity between Brahman and the world and self, and some which emphasise their mutual difference, and so on. The Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara seems to lay exclusive emphasis on and attach more importance to the first kind of texts and treat the second as secondary and less important, and also labour hard to explain the second somehow in conformity with the first. The Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita schools of Madhva and Rāmānuja, on the other hand, seem to follow reverse path and emphasise the second kind of texts at the cost of the first and so interpret the latter as to make them yield the same sense as the former.

But all this manipulation and laborious interpretation of the Upaniṣadic texts will be entirely out of place if we are prepared to admit that there are different levels of genuine experience which reveal different characters of Reality. We may then accept both kinds of texts in the Upaniṣads as equally valid, though from different levels, and say that Brahman as the ultimate reality may be legitimately described as having a qualified and determinate aspect (saguṇa and saviśeṣa), a qualityless and indeterminate aspect (nirguṇa and nirviśeṣa), and still others not known to us. A philosophy based on due recognition of all levels of genuine experience will thus be in a position to synthesise the different



systems of philosophy. As such, it may be called a synthetic philosophy. As having the support of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, it may also be called the synthetic Vedānta (samanvayī Vedānta). The germs of such a Vedānta may be found in the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna which we shall consider in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER X

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

1. *Introduction*

Sri Ramakrishna lived a life of manifold spiritual realisation. He approached Reality along numerous paths and had very varied experiences of it. He found that though these experiences differ in their specific forms and characters, yet they all relate to the same Reality and reveal only different forms or aspects of it. These experiences being equally direct and genuine, he was convinced that Reality has many aspects, forms and characters, and also that in one aspect it is formless and characterless. This is a sort of experimental verification of the truth that while Reality is one and is formless and nameless in one aspect, it may have many forms and faces in another. On the strength of such indubitable spiritual experiences and firm convictions, Sri Ramakrishna taught many truths for the good of mankind. He lived in an age in which the world was torn by conflicts of creeds and cultures, dogmas and doctrines, theologies and philosophies, and the relation between any two religious sects or communities was embittered by intolerance, jealousy and contempt of each other. It was the mission of his life to end these conflicts and bring about a reconciliation. His teachings contain the germs of a philosophy which may very well bring about a synthesis (samanvaya) of all religions and philosophies. We shall consider here the more important ideas which are either explicitly stated or implicitly contained in his teachings, and their philosophical implications. This will give us an



idea of Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy which may be called Samanvayī Vedānta in the sense of being a synthesis of all schools of the Vedānta.

2. *The Doctrine of Brahman or the Absolute as Impersonal (nirguṇa), Personal (saguṇa) and Beyond both*

According to Sri Ramakrishna, Brahman as the infinite ocean of pure existence-consciousness-bliss (sat-cit-ānanda) is the ultimate reality and the only reality. But it has many forms and aspects. He says, 'he who has realised God knows for certain that God is with form (sākāra), without form (nirākāra) and many more things which cannot be described'.<sup>1</sup> What he here calls God is the Absolute, and the Absolute, he thinks, is describable as personal and impersonal, but being beyond both, it is indescribable and inexpressible. Thus the Absolute, we may say, is the known, the unknown and beyond the known and the unknown. This is the reason why Sri Ramakrishna used to say that while all other things have been polluted by contact with our lips like a morsel of food, Brahman remains untouched by human lips.

We have it on the authority of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads that Brahman has two aspects—the personal and the impersonal, the immanent and the transcendent. Thus the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* says: "Brahman has two aspects—that with form and that without form, the mortal and the immortal, the static and the dynamic, the existent or immanent and the non-existent or transcendent".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Sri-Sri-Ramakrishna-Kathāmṛta*, Vol. I, 5th ed., pp. 56-57; Vol II, 8th ed., pp. 22-24, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Vide *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 2.3.1.



Sri Ramakrishna goes further and says that Brahman has many other aspects which defy all description and verbal expression. This seems to justify the statement that he would sometimes make that 'the experiences here (*i.e.* in him) go beyond the Veda and the Vedānta'.

Then we see that, according to Sri Ramakrishna, the Impersonal Absolute and the Personal God are not two different realities unrelated to each other, nor are they different realities inseparably related to each other as substance and quality. For him, they are the same reality in different states and with different names. Brahman and Śakti or Kālī, he would say, are non-different (*abheda*) in point of being or reality. The same reality in its essential immutable being (*nitya-rūpa*) is called Brahman or the Absolute, and in its sportive creative activity (*līlā-rūpa*) is called Kālī or the Personal God. He illustrates this truth by many examples. Just as we cannot think of fire without its burning power, or of the sun without its rays or of milk without its whiteness and *vice versa*, so we cannot think of Śakti without Brahman and of Brahman without Śakti. He says: 'Kālī herself is Brahman, and Brahman itself is Kālī. It is the same reality. When He is inactive and not engaged in the creation, maintenance and destruction of the world or any kind of activity, when we think of this, we call Him Brahman. But when He is engaged in these activities, we call Him Kālī, we call Him Śakti. It is the same individual with different names and forms'. Just as the same water of the sea is sometimes moving and sometimes motionless, or the same snake sometimes crawls and sometimes remains coiled up and motionless, so the same reality is called Kālī or Brahman according as it does or does not create, maintain and destroy the world. The reality is the



same, the difference is only in name and form, just as the same substance is called by different people by different names like 'water', 'jala', 'pani' etc.<sup>1</sup>

Here in Sri Ramakrishna's teaching we have a solution of the vexed problem of God and the Absolute, which is more satisfying than any to be found elsewhere. The word, Absolute is generally used in philosophy to mean Ultimate Reality which is the all-inclusive whole or system of all things and beings. But the word, God is frequently used in philosophy to signify, not the ultimate, all-embracing and all-encompassing Reality but a personal being or spirit who creates and governs the world and on whom all things depend. While the Absolute is the whole universe as a system of all actual and possible objects, God is the omnipotent and omniscient creator and benevolent moral governor of the world. As such, the world of finite things and minds or souls falls outside the being of God, although it is dependent on God. It follows that the Absolute includes God and the finite things and spirits which interact in the world dependent on God. So God even as the almighty creator and moral governor of the world cannot be identical with the Absolute. Hence arises the problem: How is God related to the Absolute?

To solve this knotty problem different philosophers have given different answers and held different views regarding the relation between God and the Absolute. According to some philosophers like F. H. Bradley,<sup>2</sup> God is not the same as the Absolute. He is different from the Absolute and is an aspect or appearance of the Absolute. While the Absolute

<sup>1</sup> *Sri-Sri-Ramakrishna-Kathāmṛta*, Vol. I, p. 37; IV, 1st ed., p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 9th imp., pp. 395-97.



is ultimately real, God is an appearance and so unreal. What is real cannot be self-contradictory. But the idea of God involves self-contradiction. God as the creator of the world and the object of man's worship must be outside of and external to them. As such, He is limited by the world and the finite selves, and becomes a limited and finite God. On the contrary, religion requires that there must be perfect unity and harmony between God, man and the world. This means that God must be the all-inclusive reality or the Absolute which is not the God of religion. As Bradley says: "We may say that in religion God tends always to pass beyond himself. He is necessarily led to end in the absolute, which for religion is not God". So he concludes that God is but an aspect, *i.e.* an appearance of the Absolute. But the difficulty in this view is that instead of explaining properly the relation between God and the Absolute, it explains away God by relegating Him to the sphere of appearances and, therefore, virtually denies Him. A satisfactory solution of the problem requires us to show that God even as the object of worship has absolute reality. Hence this view of the relation between God and the Absolute is not acceptable.

Some other philosophers like Spinoza, Hegel, Lotze and Whitehead hold that God and the Absolute are not two different realities. God as the Supreme Self is the ultimate reality or the Absolute. He is both the ultimate ground of the world and its creator and moral governor. On this view, God is the Absolute and there is no other Absolute than God. Some Vaiṣṇava Vedāntists go further and say that God as the Supreme Person is the ultimate reality, and the Absolute or Brahman is an aspect of God, a ray of light emanating from the person (*tanubhā*) of God. But on this view there



is a tendency to make the Absolute wholly immanent in the world and miss its transcendent aspect. Further, it affords no good ground for the distinction that we generally make between God and the Absolute. As for the Vaiṣṇava Vedāntist's idea of the Absolute or Brahman as an aspect of or emanation from the Personal God, we are to say that he turns the table upside down and distorts the Absolute to suit his pet theory. The order of evolution in any reality or being is from the subtle to the gross, from the indeterminate to the determinate, from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous. Of God and the Absolute, if we are to say at all that either is an aspect of the other, we should say that God as a determinate personal being is an aspect of the indeterminate Brahman and not *vice versa*, just as we say that the wave is of the sea and not that the sea is of the wave.

According to a third view which we find in Śaṅkara's Advaita, God and the Absolute are not two different realities. They are the same reality conceived from two different points of view. If we look at Brahman or the Absolute from the ordinary practical standpoint (*vyāvahārikadṛṣṭi*), from which the world is believed to be real, Brahman may be regarded as the cause, the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world and, therefore, as an omnipotent and omniscient being. It is then that Brahman or the Absolute appears as *Īśvara* or God. But from the higher or transcendental point of view (*pāramārthikadṛṣṭi*) Brahman cannot be called God—the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world. Brahman in his essential nature is perfectly indeterminate or characterless or *nirguṇa*. Brahman creates the world by its *māyā*. Real creativity is not an essential character of Brahman, it is only an apparent accidental predicate (*upādhi*) that we illusorily ascribe to it. Brahman is only apparently associated with



creativity (*māyopahita*), and thus appears as *Īśvara* or God. Therefore, on Saṅkara's view Brahman or the Absolute is the ultimate reality and God is an appearance of the Absolute relatively to the world. When one transcends the ordinary worldly point of view, there would be no God, but only the indeterminate Brahman or the Absolute. Following Saṅkara some modern Indian thinkers also hold that Brahman in relation to the world is God and taken out of that relation is the Absolute.

Saṅkara's view of the relation between God and the Absolute seems to be more satisfactory than any we have discussed before. For him, they do not stand for two different realities, but for the same reality conceived from two different points of view. Brahman when conceived from the real or higher transcendental standpoint is the indeterminate Absolute. When conceived from the lower empirical or practical point of view, from which the world is believed to be real, Brahman is God—the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world. But the world is conceived by Saṅkara as an appearance which rests on our ignorance. So Brahman's creative activity is not real, it is only apparent; Brahman is only *apparently associated* with creativity. It follows that God is an unreal appearance of Brahman due to its *māyā* or power of illusory creation on the one side and our *avidyā* or ignorance on the other. The position of God is, therefore, rather precarious in Saṅkara's philosophy. Such a God cannot be the proper object of devotion and worship. As for the view that Brahman in relation to the world is God or that God is Brahman from the standpoint of the world, we are to observe that there must first be a world, if we are to take Brahman in relation to the world or conceive Him from the point of view of the world. Unless there is already a world,



there can be neither any relation of Brahman to the world nor the possibility of a conception of Brahman from the standpoint of the world. But to explain the existence of the world we have to admit some sort of creative activity in Brahman and, therefore, the existence of a creator God. So to say that Brahman in relation to the world is God is to presuppose God and not to explain Him or His relation to Brahman, the Absolute.

The difficulties in which the different philosophical views discussed above, seem to be involved may be obviated if we accept the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna on the point and their philosophical implications. He teaches that Brahman and Śakti or Kālī are non-different, and the same reality which is called Brahman in its static being or state of inactivity, is called Kālī in the state of its sportive creative activity. This implies that God and the Absolute are the same identical reality in two different aspects or states. God is not an unreal appearance of the Absolute, nor a lower grade of reality than the Absolute. He is the Absolute itself as moving, acting and creating worlds without number, sustaining them and finally destroying them all. 'The primordial energy (ādyāśakti) that Kālī is', says Sri Ramakrishna, 'is by its very nature an incessant creative activity (līlāmayī); it creates, sustains and destroys worlds; that is how it plays and enjoys the delight of it'.<sup>1</sup> Such a God is not only the proper but the highest object of man's worship. He satisfies the religious need for God who is also Absolute. But creativity is only the sportive activity (līlā) of the Absolute; it may be given up as freely as it is begun. When it is given up and all activity ceases, we have Brahman in

<sup>1</sup> *Sri-Sri-Ramakrishna-Kāhāṁṛtā*, Vol. I, p. 87.



His eternal, immutable being (nitya-rūpa), and that is pure Brahman—the Absolute. God is the moving, and the Absolute is the motionless ocean of pure existence-consciousness-bliss (sat-cit-ānanda). On this view we can explain the distinction and relation between God and the Absolute from the real or transcendental standpoint without having recourse to a lower, empirical standpoint and thereby reducing God to the position of an unreal appearance of the Absolute. God is really the dynamic aspect and creative form of the Absolute which in its eternal, immutable aspect has no creativity and activity at all, and is, therefore, formless and nameless. In this aspect of it, there is in the Absolute no sun, moon or stars, no earth and heaven, no world and universe, no thing or being in particular. It is one, pure, universal existence-consciousness-bliss which is only to be experienced, but not to be expressed by words.

### 3. *The Doctrine of Brahman as the Omnipresent Reality*

For Sri Ramakrishna, as we have already seen, Brahman as non-different from Śakti or Kālī is the ultimate reality, the only reality. He holds also that Brahman is present in every thing and being of the universe. Like the Upaniṣadic seers of ancient India, he says that 'all this is Brahman'. Brahman is all that was, all that is and all that will be. The Upaniṣadic text: 'all this is Brahman' (sarvaṁ khalvidam Brahma) does not mean for him, as it does for some Advaitins (like Gauḍpāda and Saṅkara), that there is no all but only Brahman. For him, all *are* and are Brahman in different forms. Brahman as Śakti, he holds, has *become* the individual souls, the world and the twenty-four principles from prakṛti down to the physical elements. "Just as we



leave behind us all the steps of a stair in order to mount the roof of a building and on reaching it, find that the stair is built of just the same material as the roof is made of, so we realise Brahman by following the negative path of withdrawal from the world (*neti neti*), but on realisation find that Brahman is present everywhere in the world." So the negation of the world, he says, is followed by its affirmation in a new light in the life of the *viññānī* or the perfectly wise saint, if not in that of the *jñānī* or the just wise man. Thus for Sri Ramakrishna, it is Brahman as the Divine Mother (*Śakti* or *Kālī*) that has verily become everything of the world. He says that "the earth and the heaven, the sun and the moon, the temple and the garden, the jar and the pot, the bed and the bedstand, man and woman, the young and the old, birds and beasts, in a word, all are verily so many forms and manifestations of the Divine Mother, all are Brahman and beam with the effulgence of the Divine cit or consciousness". Such was the unique realisation of Sri Ramakrishna that 'all this is Brahman', that Brahman is the omnipresent reality. He, however, speaks of different degrees of manifestation of Brahman as cit in different things and beings of the universe. For him all things and beings of the world are divine in different forms and degrees of perfection; all manifest the same divine cit or consciousness, although it be in different forms and degrees. There is nothing undivine and unconscious in the whole universe.

We may mention here what may be taken as Sri Ramakrishna's argument in support of the view that all *are* and are Brahman in different forms. He used to say that just as to find the total weight of a *bel*-fruit we have to put together its kernel, stones and skin, so to know Brahman or the Absolute fully and comprehensively we have to admit all its



revelations from the different levels of consciousness, such as waking, dreaming, deep sleep and samādhi or concentration with its two stages of savikalpaka and nirvikalpaka.<sup>1</sup> So he says: "I admit all—Brahman, māyā, jīva or self, and jagat or the world; otherwise there will be something less than the total weight".<sup>2</sup> Philosophically speaking, this means that the Absolute as the all-inclusive whole or system must include all actual and possible objects of thought and experience, that all objects—realities as well as appearances—fall within the Absolute. If the Absolute excludes anything from within itself, it will be limited by what is thus excluded and cease to be Absolute. So we have to admit that the Absolute includes all objects, real as well as false or the apparently real called māyā. For Sri Ramakrishna, however, māyā does not mean Brahman's magical power of conjuring up the illusory world-show with all its wonderful objects. To him, Māyā as a metaphysical principle is the same as Śakti or Mahāmāyā who is non-different from Brahman and whom he worshipped as the Divine Mother.<sup>3</sup> In certain other contexts, especially the ethical and the religious, he used the word, māyā to signify man's ignorance and egoism, his false sense of 'I' and 'my', as when one says, 'I am so learned, so rich, so powerful', 'I can do whatever I like', or when one says 'my land, my property, my money, my children and so on'. This māyā, i.e., egoism, he says, stands as a veil between man and God and conceals Him from his sight.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 193.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 72. Cf. *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakrishṇa-līlāprasaṅga*. (Guru-bhāva-Pūrvārdha) 5th ed., pp. 110-12.



Sri Ramakrishna's statements that Brahman as the Divine Mother has become all this and that he admits all—Brahman, māyā, jīva and jagat, these among other statements may give one the impression that, according to him, Brahman is only personal (saguna) or that God as the Supreme person is the ultimate reality, while the indeterminate and impersonal (nirguna) Brahman is either unreal or only an aspect of the Personal God. But such an impression would be wrong and such an interpretation would be a misinterpretation of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. For all we know, he has made a clear distinction between the *nitya* and *līlā* aspects of Brahman, although he admits the truth of both. Brahman in its essential nature (svarūpa) or immutable being (*nitya-rūpa*) is indeterminate and impersonal (*nirguna* and *nirviśeṣa*), while in its sportive creative activity (*līlā-rūpa*) it is personal God (*saguna* and *saviśeṣa*) or the Divine Mother; and it is the Divine Mother that, he says, has become all this.<sup>1</sup> When he says that he admits all—Brahman, māyā, jīva and jagat—what he really means is that he admits both *nitya* and *līlā*.<sup>2</sup> He says even that we cannot *think* of the one apart from the other, *i.e.* of *līlā* apart from *nitya*, and of *nitya* apart from *līlā*. This means that so far as our thought can go, it cannot conceive one thing apart from its relation to another different from it, just as we cannot think of light apart from its relation to and difference from darkness. But, then, we have to admit that while *nitya* represents Brahman in its eternal, essential and immutable being, *līlā* represents it in its temporal creative activity which may have a beginning and an end in time. Sri Ramakrishna mentions with

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> *Srī-Srī-Rāmakrishṇa-Kathāmṛta*, Vol. I, pp. 180-81.



approval the Tantra as saying that when there was no creation—no sun, moon, earth and heaven—it was all darkness and the Divine Mother as formless Mahākālī was one with Mahākāla—the Eternal Being. So there is a beginning of creation. In Mahāpralaya or the great cosmic dissolution there is a total annihilation of the world, and the Divine Mother, says Sri Ramakrishna, collects the seeds of creation and lays them up like an old housewife putting used up things into her earthen pot.<sup>1</sup> Hence there is an end of creation, *i.e.*, a cessation of Brahman's creative activity. When this happens there is neither the world nor the Personal God as creator of the world. What then remains is the indeterminate (nirguṇa) Brahman.

That this is a correct interpretation of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings is borne out by his own words. "When one attains samādhi", he says, "by realising through reasoning the truth that Brahman is real and the world is unreal, all forms and figures vanish. God is no longer apprehended as a person. What He then is cannot be spoken about, *i.e.*, expressed by words. For who will speak about Him? He who is to speak has vanished. He has lost his self, his 'I' (*i.e.* his individuality). Then there is the indeterminate (nirguṇa) Brahman".<sup>2</sup> It should also be noted here that Sri Ramakrishna's oft-repeated statement that "Brahman is real and the world is unreal", and his assertion that this one statement leads to the highest knowledge can be justified only if we admit that for him Brahman as indeterminate is the highest reality and the Personal God is the form of Brahman's līlā or creative

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 38, 181.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 217-18.



activity, which is real but not eternal. It is only on this interpretation of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings that we can satisfactorily explain his last statement to Swami Vivekānanda (then Narendra) that "he who is Rāma and he who is Kṛishṇa is now Ramakrishna, but not from the point of view of your (Narendra's) Vedānta ", for, from the standpoint of Advaita Vedānta Brahman as indeterminate (nirguṇa) is the only reality, Personal God and His incarnations being all false forms and unreal entities.

#### 4. *The Idea of Brahman, Ātman and Bhagavān as different names of the same Reality*

There was, and even now is, much dispute among religious people as to what the highest object of man's spiritual life is. Some say that it is Brahman, the indeterminate being, which is to be finally realised in man's spiritual life. Some others hold that it is Ātman or the pure self in man that is the highest reality for him and that is to be discovered and realised by him. Still others think that it is neither the pure, unthinkable Brahman nor the pure but elusive self, but a living and loving God, the majestic Bhagavān that is the highest reality and also the highest object of our religious life. To end this dispute Sri Ramakrishna teaches that it is the same reality that is the nameless and formless Brahman for the jñānī or the man of philosophic insight, and Ātman for the yogin or the man absorbed in meditation, and Bhagavān or Personal God for the bhakta or devotee, the humble man of devotion. The jñānī follows the negative path of reasoning and argues that Brahman is "not this not this" (neti neti), that it is not the world, nor the individual selves. When arguing in this way his mind



is withdrawn from all external and internal objects, and becomes calm and concentrated, there is the cessation of all its modifications and the attainment of samādhi or the trance of superconscious absorption. In this state there is the experience of Brahman or of reality as nameless and formless, as the unthinkable and indescribable Absolute. This is how the Vedāntins realise Reality and speak of it as Brahman—the indeterminate Absolute. The devotees, however recognise all states of consciousness, and take the waking state as real and valid. They do not reject the world as something unreal and illusory like a dream-object. For them the world with all its wonderful objects is the manifestation of the glory of God. They believe that God has become all this, that He is within our heart and in the world outside. The devotees want to enjoy the bliss of communion with God. They do not like to identify themselves with Him. So to them reality is revealed as the loving, gracious and glorious Bhagavān. The yogin also seeks to realise the Supreme Reality by withdrawing his mind from all objects and concentrating it on the abiding reality within him, and what he finds there is the permanent, conscious self. Therefore, he speaks of the ultimate Reality as the pure self—the Ātman. “Just as the same water of the ocean”, says Sri Ramakrishna, “is congealed into the form of ice by extreme cold and is dissolved into formless water by the heat of the sun, so reality takes on form and shape for the devotee but is formless for the jñāni and the yogī. He who is Brahman is Ātman. He is also Bhagavān”.<sup>1</sup>

When Sri Ramakrishna says that “Brahman, Ātman and Bhagavān are only different names of the same reality”,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 35-36, 216-17.



he echoes the Rg-Vedic text : “ The one reality is called by the wise in different ways—Agni, Yama, Mātariśvā (*Ekaṁ sad viprā bahudā vadanti.....*).<sup>1</sup> He also supplies what may be called a philosophical justification of it on the basis of the scripture and his spiritual realisation. This will appear when we consider his teachings on the different levels of consciousness and their philosophical implications.

#### 5. *The Doctrine of Different Revelations of Reality from Different Levels of Consciousness*

Sri Ramakrishna admits different levels of consciousness from which we may have different experiences of reality and get different revelations of it accordingly. He says that ‘ in the Veda there is a mention of seven planes (*bhūmi*) in the human body. These seven planes are the seven centres of the mind. When the mind is engrossed in the world and in worldly affairs, it is located in the sex organ, the anus and the navel. It is engrossed in the thought of money and woman, and cannot rise higher. The heart is the fourth centre of the mind. When the mind comes here, there is an awakening of it for the first time and with it there is the perception of divine light all around. A man whose mind rises to this centre is astounded and dumbfounded by the vision of divine light, his mind can no longer descend to the lower planes (*i.e.* to the worldly life). When the mind of a man rises to the fifth centre in the neck, he becomes completely free from all *avidyā* or ignorance, he is solely interested in things divine and shuns everything worldly and undivine. The sixth centre of the mind is the mid-point of the eyebrows.

<sup>1</sup> *Rg-Veda*, 1, 164. 46.



With the mind ascending to this centre, a man sees the forms of God day and night. He is maddened by seeing these incomparably beautiful forms of God and wants to touch and embrace them, but fails because some slight trace of egoism or the I-sense still persists in him. The brain is the seventh centre. When the mind rises up to the brain, it is absorbed and lost in samādhi or the trance of complete absorption. In this state there is neither any consciousness of the world of objects nor any sense or feeling of the 'I'. It is in this state that there is a direct experience of Brahman in the knower of Brahman. But the path of philosophic knowledge followed by the knower of Brahman is a difficult path which is not meant for ordinary people.' <sup>1</sup>

What Sri Ramakrishna teaches here with reference to the Veda implies that we get different revelations of Reality from different levels of consciousness. While Reality is the same throughout, it is revealed to us in different ways according as we approach it from this or that level of experience. Generally speaking, we distinguish four levels of consciousness, namely, waking, dreaming, dreamless sleep and samādhi, including both savikalpaka and nirvikalpaka. Sri Ramakrishna recognises all these levels. He, however, here speaks of the seven levels of consciousness, although he mentions elsewhere other levels in different contexts.<sup>2</sup> The first three levels we may collectively call the level of ordinary sense experience. This rests mainly on the functions of the five organs of cognition or perception (jñānendriya) and the five organs of action (karmendriya) with which the human body is endowed. When we approach Reality solely from

<sup>1</sup> *Sri-Sri-Rāmakrishṇa-Kathāmṛta*, Vol. I, pp. 58-59, 218.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



the level of sense experience, it is revealed to us as a material world of physical objects with sensible qualities like smell, taste, colour, touch and sound. If a man's life be based wholly on sense experience, it would be on a par with the animal life, concerned only with eating, sleeping and pro-creating. The fourth level of consciousness may be called the level of illumined non-sensuous consciousness. Here one rises above the animal life and gets the first glimpses of Reality as hyperphysical and non-sensuous. The fifth level of consciousness may be called the level of enlightened consciousness which is free from the influence of all avidyā or ignorance and enables one to apprehend Reality as somehow divine, though distant. The sixth level of consciousness is dualistic, devotional consciousness. Here a man apprehends Reality as a personal God and himself as the 'I' or the ego related to and dependent on God as a part to the whole. He also believes in the reality of the world as the creation or manifestation of God Himself. Reality is, therefore, revealed here as the unity of subject and object, of God, man and the world as distinct and different from, but related to one another. When the mind rises to the seventh and the highest centre called *sahasrāra* (i.e. the thousand-petalled lotus in the centre of the head as described in *yoga-sāstra*), we reach a level of consciousness which is more appropriately described as the super-conscious level. This is the state of *samādhi*, and here the ego completely disappears and, with it, the whole world and even the Personal God as the creator of the world. So in this level, Reality is revealed as pure subject-objectless consciousness, as indeterminate (*nirguṇa*) Brahman.<sup>1</sup> Thus

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 35-37, 57, 180, 217-18.



we get different revelations of Reality from the different levels of consciousness.

According to Sri Ramakrishna, these different revelations are all true of Reality, for they reveal Reality itself in some form or aspect of it. Thus he says that so long as the ego or the 'I' persists, there is no denying the reality of 'you' (i.e. of Personal God) and of the world of many objects. It is only in samādhi that the ego and the Personal God are dissolved into pure, formless consciousness, and Reality is revealed as just this pure consciousness which is also pure existence and pure bliss. This pure consciousness is the pure (nirguṇa) Brahman. But between pure Brahman and Personal God there is no difference in reality. They are the same reality apprehended as formless in the one case and as having form in the other, just as the same sea may be seen as moving and motionless at different times and places. Here in Sri Ramakrishna's teachings we find a rational basis for the reconciliation of many different and conflicting systems of philosophy and religion like Dualism and Monism, Dvaita, Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita. These, among others, are the bases of the reconciliation that we have made of the classical systems of Indian philosophy in the preceding chapter.

#### 6. *The Idea of the Responsiveness of Reality*

Religious people generally believe that God grants all our prayers and gives us all the good things that we may want from Him. Sri Ramakrishna says that not only it is true that God fulfils our prayer and gives us things morally good and spiritually pure, but it is also true that He gives us whatever we earnestly desire and long for, even if they are morally bad and spiritually indifferent and injurious. He



says that God is like a wish-fulfilling tree (*kalpataru*). All sorts of people come to it and pray for all kinds of things, good as well as bad, and each gets the thing or things desired by him<sup>1</sup>. As Śrī Kṛṣṇa also says: "What objects men seek for in worshipping me, just those I give them".<sup>2</sup> Sri Ramakrishna illustrates this in the following way. He says: "As you seek so you receive; God is *kalpataru*; one receives from Him just what one wants from Him. A poor man's son after being educated becomes a judge and thinks that he is happy. Then God also says, 'you remain happy where you are'. At last when he retires from service and sits idle at home, he understands (his position in the world) and asks—what have I really done in life? God also then says, 'Yes, what have you done in life?' " Another illustration given by him in a different context may be mentioned here as being somehow to the point. "A man had a tub of dye. Many people would come to him to have their clothes dyed. He would ask: 'What dye do you want your cloth to be dyed with?' Someone would say, 'I want red'. He would at once dip that cloth in the dye contained in the tub and return it dyed red. A second man would perhaps say 'I want yellow'. The dyer would dip his cloth in the same tub and return it dyed yellow. Then he would dye a cloth blue, if so required, by dipping it in the same tub. In this way by dipping the cloths in the same tub he would dye each with just the colour desired by a man. A bystander was struck with wonder at the sight of this amazing phenomenon. The dyer asked him, 'Well, what colour do you want your cloth to be dyed with?' Then the-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. III, 6th ed., pp. 90-91, 228.

<sup>2</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā*, 4.11.



man said, ' Brother ! let me have the dye you have been dyed with ' ”<sup>1</sup>

What Sri Ramakrishna teaches here by these homely illustrations implies that God responds to our call and helps us to satisfy our desires and realise those ends which we select and set before us in life. God being the ultimate reality in its creative activity and with a personal form, we are to say that Reality is responsive to human interests and endeavours, to man's efforts to realise the ends of his life. Reality is not, as the materialists think it to be, dead to human interests and purposes; it is not the inert and insentient matter which some scientists and philosophers suppose it to be. On the other hand, the nature and constitution of Reality is such that it is responsive to all human interests and purposes and is, therefore, sentient and intelligent. It follows that Reality is not dead and insensitive to human values. Rather, we are to say that there is a place for all values in Reality. Even the so-called disvalues are not totally smothered and rejected by Reality. These disvalues are only lower values; they have a place in Reality in so far as it permits us to attain them as steps to and preparations for the realisation of higher values. Thus ignorance is a negative value or a disvalue as compared with knowledge. But it is not the negation of all knowledge. What we call ignorance is an imperfect or partial knowledge of a thing, which is the ground for the attainment of perfect knowledge of it. As such, all values and even the so-called disvalues have their place in Reality and may be realised by us in the world. Here we find a philosophical justification of the idea of God as *kalpataru* or of Reality as responsive.

<sup>1</sup> *Sri-Sri-Ramakrishna-Kathāmṛta*, Vol. I, pp. 216-17.



7. *Sri Ramakrishna's Conception of the World*

The world with all its wonderful objects is the sportive creative activity (līlā) of Brahman, the Absolute. It is not an imaginary show conjured up by an illusion-producing māyā.<sup>1</sup> It is the product or manifestation of Brahman's sportive activity which is real, though not eternal. Brahman as the Divine Mother is manifest in the world. So everything of the world—earth and heaven, plants and trees, birds and beasts, man and woman—is a form of the Divine Mother and is, therefore, real and conscious or intelligent. Yet the world has only a relative reality. It is real relatively to the līlā of Brahman, but has no permanent and eternal reality like Brahman. When the creative activity of Brahman ceases and the līlā is withdrawn, there is no thing, no being, no world at all. So also in the state of samādhi, the whole world with all its objects and even the ego of man cease to exist, only Brahman in its pure, eternal and immutable being abides and shines as a self-luminous light. That the world or anything of the world is not eternal is clearly evidenced by their changing and impermanent nature. The world is called saṁsāra which means that it is always changing and moving, that it is a process, a procession of changes. Hence while the world is real as the field of the Divine Mother's play, it has no more reality than that of the play. It is unreal and unsubstantial as compared with the immutable reality which Brahman in itself is. So it is that Sri Ramakrishna says, 'God alone is real (vastu), everything else is unreal (avastu); the world is devoid of all value (asāra), God is the only value (sāra); the world is

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 180.



impermanent (anitya), God alone is permanent (nitya)."<sup>1</sup> 'Just as in a magical performance' says Sri Ramakrishna, "the magician is real and the magical show is unreal, so God alone is sat or real (in the sense of being eternal) and the world is asat or unreal (in the sense of being non-eternal)".<sup>2</sup> It is in the light of these teachings that we are to understand his brief statement of the final philosophic truth: 'Brahman is real, the world is unreal'. For him, the world has a real existence, but a relative reality; it has not the eternal and immutable reality of Brahman.

The question that naturally arises here is this: If the world be the manifestation of Brahman's creative activity even as a play (līlā), why should there be so much of sin and suffering in the world? This is the problem of evil in philosophy. What is the solution of this perplexing problem in Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy? Briefly speaking, we may say that, according to Sri Ramakrishna, evil is a necessary part of the plan of God's sportive creation (līlā). There can be no creation of a world unless there be difference and diversity of things, that is, unless there be a plurality of things and beings which are different and somewhat opposed to one another. As Sri Ramakrishna says, 'an ornament can only be made out of gold mixed with alloy'. There can be no play of creation unless there be at last two opposed parties to it. So Sri Ramakrishna says that "without the forces of evil (jatile and kutile) there is no enrichment of līlā".<sup>3</sup> This means that there must be in creation an opposition of two forces, of which one is good

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I. p. 127; Vol. V. 1st ed., p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I. p. 16; Vol. III. pp. 208f.; IV. p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I. p. 44.



and the other evil, and that sin and suffering arise out of such opposition. Let us try to explain this more fully.

The Divine Mother as Divine Māyā is in Brahman. It does not affect Brahman but only the jīvas or individual selves. Just as the venom in the snake's fang does not poison the food taken by it, but poisons the body of others bitten by it, so the Māyā of Brahman does not affect Brahman, but others are affected and bound by it. The Divine Māyā operates in the world as two opposed forces called vidyā and avidyā. Of them, vidyā māyā is of two kinds, namely, viveka or the power of discrimination and vairāgya or the attitude of renunciation. The jīva or the individual self turns to and takes shelter in God through the help of vidyā māyā. On the contrary, avidyā māyā is of six kinds, namely, kāma or desire, krodha or anger, lobha or lust, moha or infatuation, mada or pride, and mātsarya or jealousy. It is this avidyā māyā that constitutes the ego of man and binds him to the world with the false sense of 'I' and 'my'. It is, therefore, also known as ajñāna or ignorance. But when vidyā māyā becomes manifest, all avidyā or ignorance disappears.<sup>1</sup> Now it is avidyā māyā in general and its concentration as the ego in particular that is mainly responsible for the evils in the world. It is only when a man identifies his self with the ego that he becomes an individual separate from other individuals and seeks to satisfy his selfish desires and interests at the cost of others. Here then is the ground of all the clashes and conflicts in man's life—social, national and international. It is out of man's egoism—individual and collective—that all the moral evils in the world arise. The individual as an ego is a

<sup>1</sup> Swamī Brahmānanda, *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakrishṇa Upadeśa*, 19th ed., pp. 12 ff.



relatively free being. God or Divine Mother has endowed him with a sense of freedom of action, and he thinks that within certain limits he can do whatever he likes—things good as well as bad.<sup>1</sup>

It may, of course, be objected here that God should not have given even a limited freedom to man, knowing as He does, that it may be misused by him. The answer to this objection is that without a sense of freedom there would be no individuals or separate persons, and without such separate and antagonistic individuals there would be no play of the moral drama of the world.<sup>2</sup> Further, Sri Ramakrishna says that without the sense of freedom and responsibility in men who have not realised God, there would have been more crime and sin in the world. But for the sense, given by God, that it is one's own fault to commit a sin, there would have been greater enormities in human society.<sup>3</sup> The actions done by individual selves with a sense of egoism are governed by the law of karma and produce their proper consequences in their lives. Good actions produce good consequences like contentment of mind and happiness, while bad actions produce bad results like remorse and misery. There is no escape from the operation of the law of karma. 'Nobody can digest', says Sri Ramakrishna, 'sin and mercury. If anybody eats mercury secretly, then some day it is bound to be manifested in the body. So also the fruits of sinful acts must be reaped some day or other.' Sin and suffering, in a word, evil is the necessary consequence of man's egoism and freedom.

<sup>1</sup> *Sri-Sri-Ramakrishna-Kathamṛta*, Vol. I, p. 251; IV, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 64.



These things being necessary factors in the structure of the world-drama, we are to say that evil is a part of God's plan of the world as cosmic play.

Finally, it may be asked: Why should there be any cosmic play at all? Why should God indulge in His creative activity which involves us in so much sin and suffering? The answer given by Sri Ramakrishna is that it just *pleases* God to create the world with all its diversities and enjoy the delight of it.<sup>1</sup> If there be no difference and diversity in the world, if there be no dangers and difficulties in man's life, if there be no imperfection anywhere in the world, there can be no human endeavours and achievements, no progressive course of development in the world. But in that case, there will be no history and, therefore, no world; for the world after all is a history of many things and beings and their activities with their failures and successes. From another point of view it has also been said by Sri Ramakrishna that if it pleases God to manifest *Himself* as the world of many things and beings and bear the brunt of the attack by evils in the world, we are nobody to object to it or to find fault with Him, for there is really nobody, nothing but God.<sup>2</sup> If anyone can rise up to this standpoint and view the world from it, then what now appears as evil will cease to be such and it will be all divine and nothing but divine.

### 8. *The Theory of the Ego and the Self*

The ego is what is ordinarily called the 'I' and owns other things related to it as 'my'. It is that which thinks

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 225-26.



of other things, strives for certain ends and is happy to get them, sorry to miss them. It is thus the knower (jñātā), the doer (kartā) and the enjoyer and sufferer (bhoktā). But when we search for the ego or the 'I' as thus conceived, we get none. I am not the body, the senses, the mind or the intellect, for all these we say are 'mine' and not 'me'. What we always say is 'my body', 'my mind' etc., and not 'I body', 'I mind' and so on. "Just as when we peel off the skins of an onion, one after another", says Sri Ramakrishna, "all goes out and nothing remains, so when we critically examine the 'I', we get none; what is left at last is pure consciousness, and that is the self."<sup>1</sup> Speaking philosophically, what we call the ego or 'I' is like the body, mind etc., an object of consciousness and not the abiding subject of consciousness to which they are all objects. This abiding consciousness which takes cognisance of all objects, but is never itself an object is the self of man. It follows that the ego or the 'I' is unreal; it is the product of avidyā or ignorance, as we have explained it before.

Sri Ramakrishna says that an individual (jīva) appears to be different from the self because the ego intervenes between them. This means that when the self of a man ignorantly confuses and identifies itself with the ego, it becomes a jīva or individual self. This implies that the reality of an individual is the self as pure consciousness. The pure self is the same as Brahman.<sup>2</sup> It is one, universal, eternal and free. It is above space, time and causality. It is, therefore, identical with Brahman. When an individual shakes off his egoism, and gets rid of the false sense of 'I'

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 55, 72; Vol. III, p. 226; Swāmī Brahmānanda, *Srī-Srī-Rāmakrishṇa Upadeśa*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Srī-Srī-Rāmakrishṇa-Kāthāmrta*, Vol. I, pp. 72, 74; Vol. IV, pp. 202-03.



and 'my', he realises himself as Brahman. The knowledge of the real self is the highest knowledge, it is the knowledge and realisation of Brahman. So every individual is really Brahman, although in his ignorance he may not know it and think of himself as the 'I' or the limited ego. But sooner or later, all individuals will know their real self and realise Brahman.<sup>1</sup>

Although the 'I' or the ego is false and unreal, yet it is hardly possible to get rid of it. One may be convinced by arguments that the ego is unreal and that he is not the ego, but in practical life he behaves as though he is an ego. The ego in us, therefore, persists in spite of our best efforts to eliminate it. But if we cannot get rid of it, we can transform it and sublimate it. In place of the lower 'I' or ego we may put the higher 'I'. If the 'I' cannot anyway be dismissed, let it remain as the higher 'I', i.e. as 'I' the servant of God, the devotee of God, the son of God or God Himself. This is an effective way of eliminating the vicious, undesirable 'I' and neutralising its baneful influence. While the lower 'I' is the product of avidyā or ignorance, the higher 'I' is the expression of vidyā or knowledge. It is the higher 'I' that is retained by some liberated individuals like Saṅkara so that they may live and act in the world to teach men and work for their moral uplift.<sup>2</sup>

There are four classes of jīvas or individual selves, namely, (1) the baddha or fettered, (2) the mumukṣu or the seeker after liberation, (3) the mukta or liberated, and (4) the nitya or ever free.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 226.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 218.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 66-67, 154-56; Vol. II, pp. 74-75.



Of these, the first includes all those worldly men and women in whom the ego covers up the self and who consider worldly happiness to be the highest end of life and take no interest in spiritual matters. They are so deeply attached to worldly things that they feel it painful to withdraw from worldly matters or to cease to talk about them.

The second class includes all those persons who try to free themselves from the domination of the ego and in whom the sway of the natural passions and impulses of life is weakened. They learn to discriminate between the eternal and non-eternal and, finding that all worldly things are impermanent and unsubstantial, turn to God as the only eternal reality and the highest good. With this they cease to hanker after worldly gains and try to realise the real self in them as the supreme good.

Of such spiritual aspirants only some attain the knowledge of the self as pure consciousness which is distinct from the body, the mind and the ego. They no longer think of themselves as the ego or as agents and enjoyers. They come to recognise that the pure self is not the ego, the agent or the enjoyer. It is just pure consciousness which is not involved in the changes to which the mind-body or the ego is subject. This pure self is Brahman itself. Thus self-knowledge leads to or is the same as knowledge of Brahman. These individuals who thus realise Brahman become completely free from all ignorance and all egoism. They attain liberation in this life and are called *jīvanmukta* or the living free. They belong to the third class of the liberated ones.

Then, there is the fourth class of individuals, of which the members are very few. These individuals are never deluded by *māyā*, nor swayed by egoism. They are free from



attachment to worldly things—wealth, enjoyment, name and fame—from the beginning. They never come under bondage to the world. Within a few years of their birth, they attain enlightenment and turn to God. They live and act in the world, but are never of the world. They are born in the world to teach mankind. Sri Ramakrishna very aptly compares them to the offspring of the bird, *homā* which lays its egg so high in the sky that the fledgling comes out of the falling egg and, seeing that it is near the earth and about to be dashed against it, turns round and flies up straightway to its mother on high. Very rare are such blessed souls who grace the face of the earth by their birth as human beings, and all that for the good of mankind. Nārada, Gautama Buddha, Sri Śaṅkarācārya and Swāmī Vivekānanda among others are members of this class.

### 9. *Sri Ramakrishna's Conception of Religion*

Religion, according to Sri Ramakrishna, is neither religious knowledge about God nor philosophical speculation on God, it is the direct experience or realisation of God. A man may be very learned in the scriptures and always quote the scriptures bearing on God, and still he may be as irreligious as any man in the world. He may soar high in the sky of śāstric or scriptural learning and yet have his gaze fixed on the mean and the mundane, on woman and wealth, like, says Sri Ramakrishna, a vulture that flies high up in the sky but has its eyes fixed intently on the cremation ground in search of decomposed, foul-smelling corpse. The reason for this is that the study of the scriptures without purification of the mind, discrimination and detachment bears no fruit. Without *sādhana*, i.e., spiritual



discipline, the meaning of the scriptural texts cannot be grasped and comprehended by anyone, however learned he may be. The study of the scriptures produces only book-learning which is not an experience of God. When one has this experience all scriptures and sciences become insignificant.<sup>1</sup>

In similar way, one may be a great philosopher and may have a sharp, penetrating intellect, and yet he may be a sceptic and an unbeliever in God. Or, he may be inclined to believe in God and try to prove His existence by logical arguments. Even then, he will have no acquaintance with God, but only an abstract idea of God, or at best, a belief in an unknown and unknowable existence.<sup>2</sup> We cannot prove the existence of God by any argument or reasoning. For the reason in us is not an organ of the knowledge of anything, it does not reveal the existence of anything; but it enables us to understand and interpret the experiences which we already have of things and which reveal their existence. The proofs of the existence of God leave us as unconvinced as ever about the existence of God. If we have a direct experience of God, then no proof of His existence is needed and sought for. If we have not that experience, no amount of proof will convince us about God's reality and existence. It follows that religion as a matter of life must be based on a direct experience of God, if we are to be honest and to have confidence in our religious life.

Now the question is: How are we to get an experience of God? How are we to realise God? The first thing necessary for this is purification of the mind.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I. pp. 147, 170.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



Without self-purification it is not possible to approach God and have an experience of Him. 'A needle', says Sri Ramakrishna, 'is not attracted by a magnet when it is covered with mud, but when the mud is washed off, the magnet attracts it. So when all impurities of the mind are washed off with tears of repentance, God attracts our mind as the magnet attracts the needle.' Then we should acquire the virtues of discrimination and detachment (*viveka* and *vairāgya*). We should clearly discriminate the good from the evil, the eternal from the ephemeral, and seek the former and shun the latter of the pairs. We must discriminate between the self and the mind-body and realise that the self is not the body, the senses, the mind, the intellect or the ego. We should also become free from all desire for sensual pleasures, from greed and lust for the pleasures of sense, and give up self-indulgence in any form. This attitude of aversion for all objects of sense is called *vairāgya* or detachment.<sup>2</sup>

With such purification and preparation of the mind one must enter on a course of spiritual discipline (*sādhana*) for the realisation of God. He should regularly meditate on God and hold his mind fast to the thought of God, *i.e.*, practise *dhyāna* and *dhāraṇā*. He should constantly remember God and think of Him as the dearest object of his love, as the only valuable object and end of his life. Above all, he should earnestly pray to God to reveal Himself to him, to manifest His reality before him. Then by God's grace the spiritual aspirant attains that spiritual illumination in which he has the vision of God standing face to face

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 16-17, 77-79, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Swāmī Brahmananda, *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakrishṇa Upadeśa*, pp. 95-98.



with him. Without God's grace man's religious quest is not crowned with success. 'Just as we cannot see', says Sri Ramakrishna, 'the face of a watchman at night until at our request he kindly turns the light of the lantern in his hand upon his own face, so we have to pray to God to reveal Himself to us and God being pleased gives us His grace and unveils His face before us.'<sup>1</sup> This, however, does not mean that our spiritual preparations and disciplines are all in vain and useless. We have to earn God's grace by our spiritual endeavours and disciplines (sādhana). If God in His grace reveals Himself to us, we on our part have to make ourselves worthy recipients of it by self-purification and self-culture.

#### 10. *Sri Ramakrishna's Conception of the End of Man's Life*

By the end of man's life we are to understand here the true or rather the highest end of his life. According to Sri Ramakrishna, the true end of man's life is to realise the divine in him, or to have a direct experience of God.<sup>2</sup> Man stands highest in the world of living beings and his life is an opportunity to know and realise God as the highest reality. What distinguishes man from the lower animals is just the reason in him by which he knows reality, and more especially the religious consciousness in which he enters into communion with God. So far as the satisfaction of the natural wants and impulses of life are concerned, there is nothing to distinguish man from the lower animals. Like man they also eat, sleep and produce offspring. It is man and man alone who can rise above the animal life and become conscious

<sup>1</sup> *Sri-Sri-Ramakrishna-Kathāmṛta*, Vol. I, pp. 78-79.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. I, pp. 126-28; Vol. II, p. 95; Vol. III, pp. 16-18.



of God and seek to realise Him. Man by his very nature is religious and the highest goal of his life is the attainment of God-consciousness or realisation of God.

Although Sri Ramakrishna says that the true end of man's life is realisation of God, he does not ignore or despise the other ends of life, like *kāma* or enjoyment, *artha* or wealth, and *dharma* or moral and religious works. He would advise some people to live the householder's life, do its duties and have children, but always with his mind turned towards God. Then, he would also enjoin on some people the duty of earning money to maintain their family, but with the knowledge that money or wealth is not the end of life, it does not enable us to see God.<sup>1</sup>

Dharma or karma may be done with a desire for fruit, or it may be done without any desire for fruit. The former is called *sakāma* or interested action and the latter *niṣkāma* or disinterested action. It may again be moral, like charity, relief work, medical and educational help; or it may be religious, like worship, prayer, rituals, sacrifices. Now all works, interested and disinterested, pertain to the beginning of the religious life, they do not constitute the end thereof. *Sakāma* or interested actions and works produce bad moral effects, they intensify our attachment to things of the world and make us forget God. *Niṣkāma* or disinterested work is better, but very difficult. We may think that we are doing virtuous works without any interest, but the subtle desire for fruits like name and fame surreptitiously enters into and vitiates them without our knowing it. But we should try to do good works in a disinterested spirit as far as possible. Still, disinterested work is not the end of life, it is the means

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I. p. 12; Vol. V. p. 20.



to the end which is realisation of God. We should rather pray to God to relieve us of the heavy burden of worldly work and give us pure knowledge and pure love for Him. It is thus that we have His grace and are in a position to see Him, to realise Him.<sup>1</sup>

Thus we see that for Sri Ramakrishna, neither wealth, nor enjoyment, nor even moral and religious work, be it interested or disinterested, is the true end of man's life. They are all means to the end which is the realisation of God. We may, of course, pursue the other ends of life like wealth, enjoyment and virtuous work. But all these we should subordinate to the final and true end, namely, God-realisation. We should so regulate our life that the pursuit of the other ends may not hamper but help us to realise the true and the highest end of life. The highest end is also called liberation (*mukti*). Sri Ramakrishna says that some day all men will be liberated. Our life in the world is the training ground for the attainment of liberation.<sup>2</sup>

### 11. *The Doctrine of Avatāra or Incarnation*

The word *avatāra* literally means descending or descent. In the religious context it means the descent of God to the earth in human form, *i.e.*, the birth of God in the world as a human being. So also the English word *incarnation* means embodiment of God in human form, *i.e.*, as a human being. The belief in Incarnation is common to many religions like Hinduism, Christianity, etc. But the rationalists discount the idea of incarnation on the ground that God as infinite cannot possibly assume a finite form as a human being. So

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 125-28, 138-39.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 226; Vol. V, pp. 7, 36.



there is a great controversy among theologians and philosophers as to the real significance of the idea of incarnation and the validity of the belief in it. Some thinkers hold that God is incarnate in every human being, so that there is no necessity for a special embodiment of God as this or that person, *i.e.*, as Incarnation. On the contrary, some faithful and thinking people firmly believe that God can and does incarnate Himself as a human being to meet the special moral exigencies of the world and save mankind from imminent disaster. This idea has the support of the Bhagavad-gītā in which Śrī Kṛṣṇa says: 'Whenever righteousness declines and unrighteousness ascends, I incarnate myself to save the virtuous, destroy the vicious, and restore the moral order of the world.'<sup>1</sup> Let us now consider the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna on this point.

According to Sri Ramakrishna, God does incarnate Himself in human form, *i.e.*, as a human being. He takes on the human body and comes down to the world. There is a necessity for God's Incarnation. It is true that God is present in all beings. But without an Incarnation all the needs, hopes and aspirations of mankind cannot be satisfied. It is through the Incarnation that the essential nature of God comes out best. With our limited intellect, we cannot say for certain that He cannot possibly be embodied as a man. The finite intellect cannot comprehend the Infinite. In these matters we have to accept the testimony of the seers and saints who have seen God and who always think of God. 'God—be He infinite, or however immense He may be', says Sri Ramakrishna, 'His essential nature may and does come out through man, if He so wills it.' Truth and

<sup>1</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā*, 4. 7-8.



Love supreme are the essence of the Divine Being. A cow as an individual is present in every part of its body—legs, horns, etc. But for us milk is the valued substance inside the cow's body, and that comes out through its udder. Similarly, although God is present in all beings, He incarnates Himself as man from time to time to teach mankind the supreme truth and love that He essentially is. This, however, is only a poor analogy which gives us a vague idea about the nature of an Incarnation, but not any clear comprehension of it. For this there must be some direct experience or spiritual intuition. But it is not necessary to have a full and comprehensive knowledge about Incarnation. It suffices for us to get an experience of God. It is this direct experience of God, that is all we want. And when we see an Avatāra or Incarnation we see God Himself, just as when we touch the river *Ganges* at any place, we touch the holy *Ganges* itself.<sup>1</sup>

Thus an Avatāra or Incarnation is the human medium for the expression and exposition of the love of God. God is manifested more in man than in anything else. It is in man that we are to seek for God. 'Know for certain', says Sri Ramakrishna, 'that God is incarnate in a man in whom the love of God is a surging, overflowing, all-absorbing and maddening sentiment of life.' The Incarnation is the special manifestation of God's power, and sometimes, a full manifestation of it. An Incarnation is distinguished from the liberated saint (siddha) by the fact that while the latter somehow works out his own salvation only, the former helps thousands of fettered souls to become free, just as a railway

<sup>1</sup> *Srī-Srī-Rāmakrishṇa-Kāthāṃṣa*, Vol. I, pp. 191-92, 203, 223-24, 228, 235, *passim*.



engine itself runs and draws many passengers and goods vans behind it.<sup>1</sup>

It should be noted here that while Sri Ramakrishna accepted and supported the belief in Incarnation, he would not criticise and condemn any man if he rejected the belief and accepted only the formless Brahman. He would say that man may believe in either the formless Brahman or the Brahman with form. In either case it is possible to realise Brahman, only if a man sincerely believes in and earnestly seeks Him. One may follow either path and realise the same God.<sup>2</sup>

## 12. *The Doctrine of the Harmony of all Religions*

Sri Ramakrishna not only preached the harmony of all religions, but his life itself was a harmony of all religions. He taught it and demonstrated it in his life by following many different religions and realising the same God through each of them. Before he came to preach his catholic doctrine of the unity of all religions, the followers of different religions were at war with one another. Different religious sects and communities cherished different ideas about God, accepted different religious creeds and dogmas, and adopted different methods and practices in their religious life. Each religious set or community thought that it was only its own religion that was true and could lead to salvation, while all other religions were false and would bring eternal damnation. Such was the dogmatism and fanaticism that characterised different religious sects and vitiated the religious atmosphere of the time. First, there was the general conflict between

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.



the believers in the pure Ātman and Brahman without form and quality (nirākāra and nirguṇa) and the worshippers of a Personal God with form and quality (sākāra and saṅguṇa). This leads in practice to the conflict between the religious paths of meditation (yoga), knowledge (jñāna), religious work (karma) and devotion to God (bhakti). Then, among the worshippers of the Personal God there was much bitterness and quarrel between the devotees of Śiva, Viṣṇu and Śakti or Kālī, Durgā, etc. and those of Hari, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, and so on. This is known as the conflict between Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism and Śāktism, between Hari, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa cults. Last but not the least, was the clash and conflict between the great religions of the world like Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

It was in this tense atmosphere of religious clashes and conflicts that Sri Ramkrishna preached his gospel of the harmony of all religions. He taught that all religions from crude image-worship to contemplation of the pure, formless Brahman are true and that they are all capable of leading their followers to the highest end of the religious life, namely, God. Those who are rationalists and hold that God as infinite cannot have finite forms condemn image-worship as idolatry. But they do not know that in so-called image-worship what is really worshipped is not the clay or stone image, but the conscious, intelligent Deity (cinmayī) as invoked and manifested in the image. Even if it be the clay image that is worshipped as a symbol of God, there is a need for such symbolic worship on the part of those who cannot understand and think of the formless God. Then, if it be a mistake to worship an image, God knows that it is He who is the object of worship, and He will correct our mistake when He thinks it necessary. The rationalists need



not worry about it.<sup>1</sup> Lastly, there is really no harm or mistake in image-worship. For, according to the Vedānta, God is omnipresent, He is present in anything in which we find the characteristics of existence (*asti*), manifestation (*bhāti*) and lovability (*priya*). All things of the world, the image not excepted, possess these characteristics. Therefore, God is present in all things, as much in the image as in anything else.<sup>2</sup>

As for the quarrel between the worshippers of Siva, Viṣṇu, Kālī, Kṛishṇa, Hari, Rāma, etc., Sri Ramakrishna makes it clear that there is no good ground for it. He says that Siva, Kālī, Hari, etc., are only different forms of the same reality.<sup>3</sup> God manifests Himself in different forms according as His devotees love to see Him in this or that form. That all these different forms pertain to the same reality and are only called by different names is borne out by the scriptures themselves. Thus in the Veda, Tantra and Purāṇa the same *sat-cit-ānanda* is respectively called 'sat-cit-ānanda Brahman', 'sat-cit-ānanda Siva', 'sat-cit-ānanda Kṛishṇa or Rāma'; and in the Vaiṣṇava scripture it is said that Kṛishṇa had become Kālī.<sup>4</sup> So far as scriptural evidence is concerned, we have, therefore, to admit that Siva, Viṣṇu, Kālī, Kṛishṇa, etc., are only different forms and names of the same Supreme God. As the Vedas and Upaniṣads also tell us, the many gods and goddesses are various manifestations of one Supreme God.

Now we come to the great controversy and conflict between the philosophical religions of Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 14-15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 46; IV, p. 114.



and Dvaita. The Advaita strongly advocates the conception of Brahman or the Absolute as perfectly formless (nirākāra) and qualityless (nirguṇa). It holds that the idea of Brahman as a Personal Being with form (sākāra) and quality (saguṇa) is either wrong or represents a lower grade of reality. In our spiritual life we must realise the identity between Brahman and our self. And the method of realisation is philosophic knowledge of the truth that 'Brahman alone is real and the world is unreal'. This is the path of knowledge (jñāna-mārga) which is antagonistic to those of religious work (karma-mārga) and devotion to God (bhakti-mārga), both of which proceed on the wrong assumption of the reality of the world and of an essential difference between Brahman and our self. On the other hand, the Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita maintain as strongly that the idea of Brahman as formless and qualityless is erroneous and incredible. There can be no thing or reality without quality. We have no experience of any such reality which is perfectly qualityless and characterless. Anything that we can know or think of must be something or some self with some quality or character. Hence Brahman must be the Supreme Person Who is infinite and possesses all good qualities in unlimited extent. We, finite selves, can never be identical with the infinite Brahman. We are only parts of Brahman and, therefore, completely dependent on Brahman. So also the world is created by Brahman and is, therefore, real, though dependent on Brahman. Hence in our religious life we are to realise Brahman as the highest object of our love and devotion. It is not by mere knowledge but by the performance of religious work (karma) and by whole-hearted devotion to God (bhakti) that we are to attain the end of our life which is communion with God. Mere knowledge is of



no avail without religious work, service and devotion to God. Hence arises a sort of conflict and opposition between the Advaitin's path of knowledge and the Dvaitin's and Viśiṣṭādvaitin's path of work and devotion.

Now let us consider Sri Ramakrishna's way of reconciling Advaita, Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita. This reconciliation is made by him from two sides—from the side of Brahman on the one hand, and from the side of the individual self on the other. Brahman, he says, is both without form and quality (nirākāra and nirguṇa) and with form and quality (sākāra and saguṇa). The same reality in its state of inactivity, *i.e.* static being (nitya-rūpa) is formless and quality-less, and in its sportive creative activity (līlā-rūpa) has forms and qualities. The Saguṇa Brahman is, therefore, neither unreal nor lower than the nirguṇa. Hence the worship of Saguṇa Brahman is not a mistake, nor is it inferior to the realisation of Nirguṇa Brahman, for it is the same Brahman that is realised in both, although in different aspects. We know the same man when we see him sleeping as when we see him acting. Similarly, we realise the same Brahman when we experience Him as saguṇa or as nirguṇa.

Then, from the side of the individual self (jīva), Sri Ramakrishna says that so long as the 'I' persists in man, there must also be the 'you'. This means that so long as a man thinks of himself as an ego or 'I', there is no denying the reality of God as a Personal Being and of the world as created by God.<sup>1</sup> Philosophically speaking, it means that so long as the individual self occupies a dualistic level of consciousness, as in waking and even in savikalpaka samādhi, his experience of God must be in the form of the subject-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, chaps. iii-iv., pp. 35-38; Vol. IV, p. 240, *passim*.



predicate relation. God will thus be apprehended by him as a subject with certain qualities like consciousness as His predicate, *i.e.*, as a conscious subject or person. He will also know himself as another conscious subject different from but related to God. The religious relation between man and God will here take the form of a relation between two persons, of whom one is finite and the other infinite, one dependent on and devoted to other who is independent and benevolent. But when the 'I' or ego in man disappears as in nirvikalpaka samādhi, both the world and its personal creator, God will disappear. God will no longer be apprehended as a subject of consciousness, but as subject-objectless consciousness which is the pure self or Brahman. But unless and until the 'I' is completely effaced in nirvikalpaka samādhi, the reign of the Personal God continues and bhakti or devotion to God remains the proper attitude of the religious life. Now the Advaita has its basis in nirvikalpaka samādi, while Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita arise out of savikalpaka samādhi. But here we must admit that in both the kinds of sāmādhī there is the revelation of the same reality in its different aspects. So Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita are all true in so far as they arise out of genuine spiritual experiences and are different revelations of the same reality. So also the different paths of jñāna, karma and bhakti should be recognised and respected as different ways of approaching and realising the same reality called by the different names of Ātman, Brahman and Bhagavān.<sup>1</sup> This is Sri Ramakrishna's catholic way of reconciling Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*



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In the history of religion we find that many disputes and conflicts have raged round the great religions of the world like Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. While Hinduism is more tolerant in relation to other faiths, Christianity and Islam are found to be militant against different religions and decry them in strong terms. They even consider the followers of other faiths to be infidels and predict eternal damnation and perdition for them. Sri Ramakrishna's teachings go a long way to resolve the conflicts of these religions, if not to end them. In the light of his experiments with Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, he declares that all these religions, if followed and practised sincerely, lead to the realisation of the same God. They may differ in their creeds and doctrines, ways, means and methods. But these do not constitute the essence of religion. The essence of religion is the direct experience of God. So far as this is concerned, Hindus, Christians and Muslims agree; they reach the same goal—God—by travelling along different paths. So there is an essential unity of all these religions, only they call the same goal or reality by the different names of Bhagavān, God and Allah, just as they drink the same water of a tank from different sides and give it the different names of *jala*, *pāni* and *aqua*.<sup>1</sup> Even with regard to the Buddha and his religion, Sri Ramakrishna says that the Buddha was not an atheist or unbeliever in God. He became the Buddha by meditating on that which is of the nature of bodha (bodhasvarūpa), i.e. pure consciousness which is the same as God, only he could not express it by

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 37; Vol. IV, p. 224.



words.<sup>1</sup> Thus Sri Ramakrishna reconciles the great religions of the world, which seemed so long to be at war with one another.

In conclusion we may note some important general statements made by Sri Ramakrishna with regard to the harmony and reconciliation of the apparently conflicting religions of the world. 'He (God) is infinite', he says, 'and infinite are the ways of approach to Him'.<sup>2</sup> Just as the temple of Goddess Kālī at Dakṣiṇeswar (near Calcutta) may be reached by a country boat, a steam launch, a motor car or on foot, so God may be approached and realised by following many religious paths. It is by God's will that so many different religions have appeared in the world to suit the needs of different men and women with different tastes, temperaments, aptitudes and abilities. Just as a mother gives different food-stuffs to her different children to suit their different digestive powers, so God has made different religions to suit the different intellectual capacities of His children.<sup>3</sup> Let all men and women of the world sincerely follow their own religions as true, but never think that only their religions are true, and all others are false and erroneous. All religions are true, all lead to the same God.<sup>4</sup> As Śrī Kṛṣṇa also says in the *Bhagavad-gītā*: 'In all forms of worship, men follow the path unto me'.<sup>5</sup> This idea is neatly expressed in an oft-quoted Sanskrit verse which means: 'Men adopt various religious paths, straight and crooked, according to their different tastes; yet you (*i.e.* Śiva) are

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 287.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 186.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224; Vol. V, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā*, 4.11



the goal of them all, just as of all rivers the ocean is the only goal'.<sup>1</sup> It is this old gospel of the Hindu faith that Sri Ramakrishna preaches with a new force and freshness when he says: "So many religions are so many paths." Let the whole world listen to it and live by it, so that all religions may live and flourish in harmony and peace.

### 13. Conclusion

All that we have stated and explained before gives, in brief, the main ideas and doctrines of the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna. We may now try to determine the precise nature and character of the philosophy that we find in him. As we have said at the outset, Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy is Samanvayī or Synthetic Vedānta, since it reconciles the different schools of Vedānta. But speaking more precisely, we are to say that it is the philosophy of Neo-Advaita, neither Dvaita nor Viśiṣṭādvaita. It is not Dvaita or Dualism, because it holds that there is only one ultimate reality, Brahman, neither two nor more than two. It cannot also be characterised as Viśiṣṭādvaita or qualified monism like Rāmānuja's. For, unlike Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita, it believes in the nirguṇa or indeterminate Brahman, which Rāmānuja does not. It is a philosophy of Advaita like Śaṅkara's, but a new type of Advaita. While agreeing with the traditional Śaṅkarite Advaita in certain fundamental points, Ramakrishna's Advaita goes beyond Śaṅkara's in certain important respects. It is more positive than Śaṅkara's Advaita which is more negative. It is reconciled with Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Śakti-advaita of Tantra and other types of

<sup>1</sup> *Puṣpadanta*, "Śivamahimnaḥ Stotraṁ", 7.



Advaita, while Śaṅkara's Advaita cannot, from the transcendental standpoint, be reconciled with these, although some sort of compromise among them may be effected from the empirical or practical standpoint. Let us explain these points of agreement and difference between Śaṅkara's and Rāmākrishna's Advaita.

In Śrī Rāmākrishna's philosophy, as in traditional Advaita, Brahman is the ultimate reality and the only reality, one without a second. But while for Śaṅkara, it is, from the transcendental standpoint, perfectly indeterminate and qualityless (nirguṇa), for Śrī Rāmākrishna it is, even from the transcendental standpoint, both indeterminate and determinate, qualityless and possessed of quality (nirguṇa and saguṇa). According to Śaṅkara, māyā as creative power is not an essential character of Brahman, it is only an apparent accidental predicate (upādhi) that we illusorily ascribe to Brahman. According to Śrī Rāmākrishna, Brahman and Śakti or the Divine Mother are non-different (abheda). Śakti is not māyā in the sense of a magical power of creating illusion, but is a real power of creativity in Brahman or is Brahman Himself as engaged in the activity of creation, maintenance and destruction of the world. It is the līlā-rūpa or creative form of Brahman. Even when the creative activity of Brahman ceases and the līlā-rūpa disappears, Śakti as formless Mahākālī rests and is equipoised in the formless Brahman.

Śrī Rāmākrishna's Advaita agrees with Śaṅkara's in holding that man's real self is identical with Brahman and that it is only avidyā or ignorance and egoism that separate the individual self (jīva) from Brahman. According to both, the ego or 'I' (aham) is the product of ignorance and, therefore, unreal. This ignorance can be removed by vidyā or knowledge of the self as pure consciousness and so as identical



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with Brahman.. According to Sri Ramakrishna, both vidyā and avidyā belong to Brahman, but for Śaṅkara Brahman is only *apparently associated* (māyopahita) with them. Still, for both Śaṅkara and Sri Ramakrishna, realisation of the identity between self and Brahman is the final and destined goal of all individuals.

Then, according to Śaṅkara, Brahman, conceived from the worldly standpoint or as *apparently associated* with creativity (māyā), is called Īśvara. So Īśvara is after all an appearance which is neither real nor unreal. But for Sri Ramakrishna, Īśvara or the Personal God is really the creative form (līlā-rūpa) of Brahman. The worship of the forms of God including that of images has, therefore, a rational basis, even from the transcendental standpoint, in Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy, while it has only a practical value in Śaṅkara's philosophy. Even from the transcendental standpoint, God is real, though not eternal, since there may be a cessation of Brahman's creative activity. So also the world, created by God, is real for Sri Ramakrishna even from the transcendental standpoint. It is not, as Śaṅkara holds, mithyā or illusory, i.e., neither real nor unreal. Of course, Sri Ramakrishna emphatically affirms that the world is anitya or impermanent. So for him, the world is real but not eternal, since it may be destroyed by God's will or with the cessation of the creative activity (līlā-rūpa) of Brahman.

Finally, we find in Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy a synthesis and reconciliation (samuccaya and samanvaya) of the four main paths to the realisation of God and the attainment of liberation. These are the paths of jñāna, yoga, karma and bhakti. Śaṅkara does not recognise all these paths as equally good and efficacious means for the attainment of liberation. He does not believe in their samuccaya



or combination and synthesis. For him, jñāna is the only primary and final means for the attainment of liberation, while the others may be adopted and recognised as secondary and preparatory for purposes of self-purification and generation of the desire to know Brahman. But for Sri Ramakrishna, they are equally good and valuable means for the realisation of God and for liberation. What prevents man from realising his real self or God is the veil of ignorance or egoism in between him and God. This veil may be removed and God directly experienced or realised by following any one of these paths. The veil of egoism may be pierced by the light of self-knowledge (jñāna), it may be penetrated by self-concentration in yoga, it may be blown off by the breeze of selfless or disinterested work (karma), and it may be dissolved by the flow of self-surrendering love of God (bhakti), as well. All this has been emphatically affirmed by Svāmī Vivekānanda, whom we may call the living exposition of Sri Ramakrishna, when he says: "Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divine within. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy, by one, or more, or all of these—and be free."<sup>1</sup>

These are, in short, the reasons why we characterise Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy as Neo-Advaita. It is a positive and living Advaita. It is the new Advaita Vedānta that serves best the needs of modern life with all its bewildering complexities and complications. It is just the philosophy that we need today to inspire our individual and national life and help us to make lasting contribution to real peace and happiness in the world.

OM TAT SAT

<sup>1</sup> Svāmī Vivekānanda, *Raja-Yoga*.















*Infante*